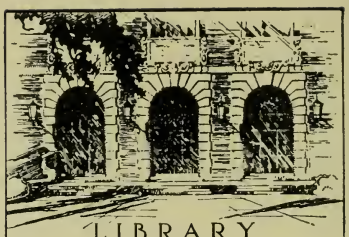

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MAX WENTWORTH.

MAX WENTWORTH.

"Les hommes sont la cause que les femmes ne s'aiment pas."—*La Bruyère.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MAX WENTWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

"A foolish suitor to a wedded lady!"

CYMBELINE.

TRESHAM returned, according to his promise, early on the following morning, and exclaimed, as he entered the room where the Miss Wentworths were engaged at work, while his wife and Mr. Stanley occupied the two most desirable sofas,—"My task is nearly accomplished, and in a few days the election comes on, when our candidate is certain of carrying all before him."

"Indeed," said his wife, trying to appear interested; "and are we to go to Truro for the election?"

"Go to Truro for the election?—of course not. What could put such an idea into your head?"

Mrs. Tresham looked despairingly at Melicent, upon this failure of her first attempt at taking part in her husband's pursuits; whilst he remained convinced that her only anxiety about the election arose from the trouble she supposed consequent upon his gaining the day. "Thursday will be the first of September," he said, a few moments afterwards; "and I have been obliged to ask a large party to shoot here; however, they are only sporting men, and need be no trouble to you."

"Oh, I do not mind their coming at all," said his wife; "you will be out all day, and sportsmen never want entertainment in the evening, because they have their own exploits to

enlarge upon, and that sends one to sleep delightfully !"

"Have you no letters for me, Laura?" said her brother; "very strange that we hear nothing of Hopkinson !"

"Nor of Lindesay," remarked Tresham.—"Really our friends are not very ceremonious."

"I always thought Lindesay's being able to join us uncertain," said Lymington. "Hopkinson, however, we are sure of;—I expect him every moment."

Melicent and Isabel looked almost equally dismayed by this intelligence, but as Mr. Hopkinson appeared so great a friend, not only of Lord Lymington, but also of Mr. Tresham, they thought it their duty to remain silent. Mrs. Tresham, however, considered herself fully entitled to speak.

"You cannot seriously be anxious, Frank, to see that strange creature? What you could both of you find in him so very delightful, I

cannot imagine. He will not, surely, think of coming here."

"Oh yes! I have not the least doubt of his speedy arrival; the attraction is so strong," he added, looking at Isabel, "that the poor fellow will never be able to keep away. I should not wonder, if he were now employed in preparing Mount Pleasant for the reception of its future mistress."

"Your sister, Miss Wentworth," said Tresham, also glancing at Isabel, "feels apparently too keenly, to bear comment on this subject with composure. She never can hear Mr. Hopkinson's name coupled with her own, without disturbance; in time she may grow accustomed to it. But will you not walk out this fine morning? I have some planting going on in the grounds, and want your taste, and your sister's, in superintending the labourers."

"Mrs. Tresham will give her opinion, I dare say," answered Melicent, willing to strengthen

her good resolutions. "Pray come;—it is just the kind of day you like—not too warm, and without too much wind."

Mrs. Tresham, however, had made up her mind that, during their absence, she would attempt the dreaded expostulation with Stanley; and really, even *that* seemed preferable to the exertion of leaving her beloved sofa, and walking through the grounds. "Oh, my dear!" was her reply, after a momentary hesitation, "what can it signify to me how trees are planted, that I never shall take the trouble of going to see? Pray let it be as you and Tresham think best, and I have no doubt I shall be quite satisfied."

Melicent, Isabel, Tresham and Lymington, were soon busily engaged in discovering where the planting might be an improvement, and where the old trees by their massy foliage already obscured too much of the view of the Abbey, or the windings of the river. More than once Melicent looked towards the windows

of the saloon, longing to know whether Mrs. Tresham had at length summoned courage to speak seriously to Mr. Stanley, and wondering whether her own admonitions would prove productive of good to the family, or only tend to involve herself in any dilemma with that presuming personage. Tresham, meanwhile, perfectly unconscious of what might be passing within the walls of the Abbey, was busily employed with his workmen, and could not help avowing to himself, that it was long since time had passed as quickly, and agreeably, as during the last week, when he had been so fully occupied.

"I wish Laura had been with us," said her brother; "I do not believe that she has ever taken the trouble of coming as far as this beautiful part of the grounds since she has been at St. Austin's. You really ought to make her exert herself more, Tresham, or she will become a confirmed invalid."

"You are supposing me to possess magic power, if I am to transform your sister into an active character. Stanley, who is a perfect lady's man, will relate some tale of scandal or gossip, which will please her far more than inhaling this fresh breeze, and looking at the view which the Miss Wentworths, with better taste, seem so much to enjoy."

Tresham spoke somewhat bitterly; and Lymington felt with pain that he had no excuse to offer for his sister, to whose faults he was fully alive; while he loved her yet more tenderly for the very fragility of character which, while it grieved him, seemed to testify how much she stood in need of protection. Some hours elapsed before they thought of returning to the house; and as they walked slowly back, beneath the shade of the overhanging trees, they met Stanley quietly proceeding down the avenue, and deeply engrossed in the last volume of a fashionable novel. After a brief colloquy, he passed on,

saying that he should visit the scene of their late labours; nor were any traces of the despairing and rejected lover visible in his easy and unembarrassed air. "She has not spoken to him then, after all!" thought Melicent; and this conviction was yet farther strengthened when, on finding the saloon deserted, and proceeding to Mrs. Tresham's dressing-room, she found her tranquilly reposing in her *fauteuil*, with the other volume of Stanley's novel in her hand, while Mademoiselle Celestine was arranging her profuse and beautiful hair for dinner.

A large case of Parisian millinery was standing open in the middle of the room, and to this Celestine immediately endeavoured to direct Miss Wentworth's attention, though it seemed to receive little from her indolent mistress, whose *coiffure* being at length completed, and the attendant dismissed, until Mrs. Tresham should have acquired courage to proceed farther with her toilette, Melicent had an opportunity of say-

ing,—" You were not able then to speak to Mr. Stanley after all? How very provoking, when you had made up your mind to do so."

" Oh yes! I did," replied her friend; " and you have no idea how disagreeable it was! It was just as I thought—I did no good at all—on the contrary, I am afraid I made things a great deal worse, and I am more at a loss than ever!"——

" How could that be?" inquired Melicent; " if you told Mr. Stanley that you did not approve of his behaviour, and would not permit it to continue any longer, how could that make it worse?"

" Why, I could not say it in that way, you know;—and I sat thinking for a long time how I was to begin; and he, for a wonder, not speaking a word, but very quietly reading as he lay comfortably on the sofa. Well, at last, I was afraid some one might come in and interrupt us, and so I began immediately; but it is so long

since, that I cannot in the least recollect what I said, and I am sure that it must have been perfectly unintelligible. What I meant to tell him was that I was very much annoyed at his being so absurd and sentimental;—but then it was so awkward, because he was not saying a word;—I grew quite confused and stopped in the middle, not knowing what to do. Well, then, he began with assuring me of his respect and admiration for my character;—and how much he wondered at Tresham's not appreciating his good fortune in possessing such a wife—and I cannot tell what nonsense besides."

"And is it possible that you allowed him to say this? and to insinuate, so maliciously and falsely, doubts of Mr. Tresham's affection for you?" exclaimed Melicent, indignantly.

"I thought at the time it was very wrong, and that makes me say I only made everything worse; for really I could not stop him, or get in a word to express my anger, and so he went on

in the most absurd way you can imagine; and I was quite delighted when Celestine came to tell me that there was a case of millinery arrived from Paris, because, by pretending to be anxious to see it, I got rid of Stanley, whom I quite detest now, though I shall never venture to expostulate with him again, since you see it only made him so very annoying."

"But what is to be done then? Mr. Tresham, I assure you, appeared far from pleased at your remaining with Mr. Stanley to-day, and seems disposed to notice his marked attentions to you."

"Tresham displeased at my not going with you!—how very strange! And you really think he did not like my staying with Stanley. What could it signify to him?"

"He was probably annoyed that you should prefer remaining alone with Mr. Stanley, to joining him, and interesting yourself in his projected improvements."

"Yes, I thought of that; but then there was that dreadful conversation that I wanted to have off my mind; and I never supposed that Tresham cared about my presence and opinion. I am sorry I did not go with you."

"So am I," said Melicent; "but you must not think your exertions over yet, since, by your own account, Mr. Stanley's presumption appears to be rather increased than checked."

"It may be so; but I never can make myself so absurd again as I did to-day. Unless you you can manage it for me, and prevent Stanley's going off in those rhapsodies, I really must give up the thing altogether."

"What do you mean?" asked Melicent; "that you will allow Mr. Stanley to persist in his love-making, until Mr. Tresham discovers what is going on, and takes the affair into his own hands? You would certainly be freed from all further trouble in the business, were that to be the case!"

"How can you talk so shockingly, Melicent? I declare you make me quite nervous. No;—if this is so sure to happen, I must try again what I can do, since you will not speak to Stanley for me, which would be so much better!"

Melicent again positively declined the office assigned to her, and Mrs. Tresham went on, with a sigh;—

"Well, then, on one condition I will do what you require; but, for once, I too will be positive, and not attempt anything of the sort unless you consent to this. Indeed you must see how wholly unequal I am to all this, without your assistance. Now, if you were only to stay in the room, I think I could do it better, and Stanley, of course, could not talk as he did to-day if you were present."

"But what will Mr. Stanley think of my interference in a matter that cannot in any way concern me? Consider how awkwardly I shall

be situated, while you are convincing Mr. Stanley of the impropriety of his conduct."

"Yes, it will be very disagreeable for us both, and I have no right to expect this from you. It is all my own fault, and I ought certainly to try to extricate myself without making you uncomfortable;—but then I know I cannot;—I did my best to-day. If I were to try twenty times, I shall do no better, were Stanley to go on as he did then."

"Say no more; I will certainly remain with you," replied Melicent, softened by her distress, and by the tears which actually stood in her eyes. "You must, however, promise to let me remain perfectly silent;—not to appeal to me in any way, but to say the very little that is necessary yourself."

"Oh! I will do anything if you will but remain with me!" exclaimed her grateful friend. "A thousand thanks, dearest Melicent! all will now be right: when you are there I shall not

be frightened; and I do hope Stanley will go! He cannot be so provoking as to stay on much longer, when he sees that we both want so very much to get rid of him."

"I should think there could not be a doubt on the subject, if you will but tell him plainly that he must not stay."

"Well, I hope I shall do it right at last!" said her friend, whose courage was now again on the decline. "The idea of my turning poor Stanley out of doors! How amused Tresham would be!"

Melicent now hastened away to dress for dinner, not a little uneasy as to the consequences of the promise she had given; but with rather more hope than she had yet entertained of rendering Tresham and his wife more attentive to each other's happiness, and seeing real affection substituted for the cold politeness which generally marked their intercourse. She did not mention to her sister anything of what

had passed, or of the unpleasant scene likely to ensue, knowing that Isabel would be distressed at the annoyance to which she was exposed by the weakness of their friend; but she determined that nothing should be wanting on her part to extricate Mrs. Tresham from her painful situation; regardless that she was thus probably creating a bitter enemy towards herself, as Stanley would of course attribute to her advice the unwonted decision which she trusted Mrs. Tresham would display.

CHAPTER II.

"Favours! by Jove that thunders!"
ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA.

"THE Miss Wentworths have not yet seen Falmouth and its beautiful harbour—why should you not accompany us thither to-morrow?" said Mr. Tresham after dinner, to his wife, having previously informed her that he and Lymington should be obliged to spend the morning there. Mrs. Tresham, still in all the vigour of her good resolutions, offered no objections; and a cloudless sky favouring the design, the whole party met round the breakfast table in readiness for the excursion.

"Positively, Tresham, I begin to dread that your present mania is contagious, since Lymington seems so largely to partake in it!" remarked Stanley, as he took his usual seat next their hostess. "You are both indefatigable enough to deserve canonization from the Cornish natives; but he must appear to them the most disinterested martyr that ever, without hope of fee or reward, sacrificed himself to the weal of a county!"

"However just may be the high compliment you pay to my late exertions," replied Lymington, "I must acknowledge that the good people here owe me little for my meditated visit to Falmouth to-day. I want to see the Falcon, which has been under repair, and which I have sadly neglected for some time past. When she is refitted, I think of taking one more trip in her this season, before laying her up for the winter. You ought to feel in duty bound to pay a visit to your old acquaintance," he continued,

turning to the Miss Wentworths; "and as Stanley's sense of my recent fatigues must compel him to grant repose to be my due, I trust that you will not treat me as unkindly as on our Penzance expedition. Laura, you must give me a place in your carriage."

"This is the first time that I ever knew you prefer going with us, Frank, to riding or driving. I thought you always protested against the dulness of going comfortably in a carriage."

"Whatever may have been my past opinions, I now protest to you that I am not in the least apprehensive of finding the drive tedious to-day. Do not let your considerate fears therefore be a plea against my admittance."

"Indeed we shall be very glad to have you with us," said his sister, really delighted at the prospect of having him as a companion instead of Stanley. "It will be quite a novelty, and so very nice!"

"You will ride, I suppose, Tresham," said

Stanley; " my horse must have become unmanageable for want of exercise, but I never can endure to go out for a constitutional ride or walk."

Their drive was through a pleasant and varied country, and Mrs. Tresham, freed from immediate dread of the explanation with Stanley, was in unusually good spirits. Lymington's vivacity and capability of deriving amusement and pleasure from the most trifling sources, rendered him a far more agreeable associate than Stanley, whose wit depending upon the follies of his acquaintance and the incidents of society, soon failed when thrown upon its own resources, leaving him to suffer the discontent and ennui of a man formed to shine in the gay world, and buried in the seclusion of a country place. It was from this cause, principally, that arose his persecution of Mrs. Tresham; for, had other sources of amusement presented themselves, he would not have been imprudent enough to en-

gage in a serious flirtation with the wife and sister of such men as Tresham and Lymington. Time, however, hung heavily upon his hands —the flattering partiality of the *insouciante* Mrs. Tresham, for his society and conversation, at first attracted him, and he had not sufficient quickness or delicacy of feeling afterwards to perceive that his attentions were only permitted from her want of energy to check them.

On their arrival at Falmouth, the carriage stopped at the principal hotel, commanding a view of the fine harbour, crowded with vessels, among which they quickly discovered Lord Lymington's graceful schooner. Having given his horse to the servant, Tresham was advancing to his wife's assistance, when he perceived that Stanley, who had already dismounted, was now kneeling on the step of the carriage, while he unfastened and removed the boots which had been intended to guard Mrs. Tresham's pretty little slippered feet from the least cold or damp.

In no agreeable mood he turned away, saying he would rejoin them at the hotel, after transacting the business which had brought him thither, and desired Lymington, as soon as Mrs. Tresham's toilette should be completed, to escort the ladies on board the Falcon. Mrs. Tresham, without having in the least noticed his altered tone, or the angry exclamation which had escaped him, allowed Stanley to finish his task, "which he always did so very nicely;" and whilst Tresham proceeded rapidly to the town, the rest of the party, having procured a boat, were soon upon the deck of the yacht, whence the best view was to be obtained of the forts of St. Mawe and St. Anthony. There was abundant loveliness in the scene to engross their whole attention during the time required for Lord Lymington's directions respecting his vessel; after which they were again landed close to the hotel, and rejoined by Tresham, preparatory to resuming their places in the carriage, and

proceeding towards Pendennis Castle. Here the steepness of the ascent caused all excepting Mrs. Tresham to prefer walking; and Lymington, offering his assistance to Isabel, gave utterance to ideas which had for some time been occupying his thoughts.

"How I wish that you and Miss Wentworth could make Laura more like yourselves! Although I have always regretted her languor and inactivity, yet I never knew till lately the exact degree in which I should like them to be removed. The fact is, that I have hitherto considered the generality of women as too inferior to my truly feminine and interesting sister, to feel any desire that she should resemble them."

"Indeed I think you were quite right," replied Isabel. "Mrs. Tresham is one of the most charming and engaging persons I ever saw; and though for her own sake you may desire her to acquire more activity and resolution of character, yet I can scarcely imagine that any alteration would

be wished for in her gentle and pleasing manners."

"Perhaps not,—it is rather her disposition that I would change; and yet it is only from habit that she appears cold and insensible. I know that her heart and feelings are naturally warm, and I am perhaps the only person in the world who thoroughly appreciates her many excellent qualities. Now, however, for the first time, I perceive how very far the sister I so much love is from the excellence to which a woman may attain. It seems to me that your sister is precisely what ought to be most admired—so gentle and feminine—with so much superiority of character, and with such delightful manners—I do not say that I have not met with charms possessing a more peculiar interest for *me*, but we will not speak of that."

"Certainly, I do not think there is much chance of Mrs. Tresham's becoming very like Melicent at present; but I hope when she is

stronger, that as she seems to like being at St. Austin's, she will begin to show more interest in all about her. Mr. Tresham is, I think, much happier from having acquired a zest for country pursuits."

"Oh! Tresham is quite a different man!—that makes me regret the more, that my sister does not exert herself to confirm his present good intentions. If some strong motive once roused her from her apathy, I should not despair. Your being here has certainly done her good."

"I fear we must not remain much longer away from my uncle. In the letter we received from him this morning, he seems to desire to have us at home again, and we should be very ungrateful if we hesitated to comply with his wishes."

"Then you will return to Wentworth Court, Mr. Walsingham, and the smugglers!—when Devonshire possesses so many attractions, I can readily believe that you will not regret leaving St. Austin's."

"Indeed you are quite wrong. I never knew any time pass so pleasantly as that we have spent here. My rencontre with the smugglers was anything but agreeable, and I do not know why you should suppose Mr. Walsingham such an attraction."

"Had I not thought him so I should not have submitted to be treated by you with the mortifying friendliness you always testify—Does Sir Arthur mention his nephew ?"

"He does, and in a far milder spirit than formerly. It seems that Mr. Wentworth, during his late residence abroad, has really seen occasion to renounce many of the opinions he had imbibed, and which were so offensive to my uncle."

"So Hopkinson told you."

"Sir Arthur expresses himself in general terms as perfectly satisfied with his nephew's conduct since his return to England. You see therefore, he is by no means implacable, and

will doubtless restore my cousin to favour, when satisfied that he repents his former waywardness."

"Well! I only hope Maximilian's haughty temper will not mar these smiling prospects; I own that I despair of his proving as penitent and submissive as Sir Arthur will probably expect."

"Your friend must be of a most alarming and fiery temperament, if he cannot stoop to acknowledge that he regrets his offences towards so kind a guardian. I trust that his ill-judged passion will not again tempt him to disobedience."

"Did not Hopkinson assure you that there was nothing serious in that affair?"

Isabel's patience gave way under this reiterated attack. "You cannot seriously, Lord Lymington, suppose me foolish enough to believe that my cousin, Mr. Wentworth, was likely to confide his inmost sentiments to such a person

as Mr. Hopkinson ? Perhaps I ought to apologise, however, as I am speaking to one who professes himself also a friend of that gentleman."

"Oh never mind ! I know you don't like Hopkinson, and for that reason I shall be particularly sorry if he does not come to St. Austin's while you are there—because when you have known him longer, you cannot fail to be pleased with him."

Isabel vouchsafed no answer to this remark, and they had by this time reached the summit of the hill, and were looking down upon the beautiful panoramic view. Falmouth, with its old walls and noble harbour, lay below, surrounded by gay cottages and villas embosomed in groves and gardens. Across the water, the sunbeams were falling brightly upon the fort and hamlet of St. Mawe ; and beyond, and nearer the mouth of the estuary, towered the bold rocks from which the beacon-light sheds nightly its red reflection on the waves.

The steep eminence was now to be descended on their return, and Mrs. Tresham's timidity induced her to lend a willing ear to Stanley's advice, that she should not attempt it except on foot; but if he aimed at being her escort, he was disappointed, as Lymington was for once too quick and decided for him to carry his point. The young nobleman himself offered his arm to his sister, to whom, at that moment, the idea first occurred, that his request that morning, for a seat in her carriage, might have been made for the express purpose of dislodging Stanley, whom he might not choose always to be seen by her side. She could not disguise from herself also, that the presumption of her admirer had visibly increased since he had been allowed, on the preceding day, to treat her as a neglected wife, and freely to blame the conduct of Tresham; and terrified at the thought of Lymington's anger and its consequences, she now longed as earnestly for an opportunity of enlightening

Stanley respecting her real sentiments, as she had dreaded it in the morning, and felt more decidedly than ever that she could not hope to be freed from her distressing embarrassments, until he should finally have departed from the abbey of St. Austin's.

CHAPTER III.

"When he came to his ladye's bower door,
He stood a little forbye;
And there he heard a fou fause knight,
Tempting his gay ladye."

OLD BALLAD.

THE party assembled at St. Austin's on the morning of the first of September, consisted of several gentlemen of the county, who had readily accepted Tresham's invitation to shoot over his magnificent preserves, and to partake of the hospitality for which the owners of the Abbey had formerly been distinguished. It was true that of late years its gates had ceased to be thrown open to the whole neighbourhood, as of

yore, on festive occasions—the times for such antediluvian delights were passed, and although Tresham's good feeling would perhaps have induced him to keep up the old customs of his family, the horror with which Mrs. Tresham regarded such a course, had caused them during the few and short visits they had paid to their Cornish residence, to lead a secluded and inactive life. Now, when the interest inspired by the contested election had brought Tresham in contact with his neighbours, he found that with partial differences of habits and tastes from his own, they yet possessed so much genuine worth and honourable feeling, that their society was not rendered agreeable merely by its novelty;—as he became more engaged in country pursuits and amusements, conversation upon those topics acquired more interest than he could at first have believed possible; and he now beheld with pleasure his ancient halls, after their long comparative solitude, once more filled with those whose forms

and faces had there, as a boy, been familiar to him. In that remote country, meanwhile, few events had occurred of sufficient importance to banish from memory the young and high-spirited heir of St. Austin's, and the affection with which he was greeted wherever he went by those whom he was conscious of having forgotten for years, roused a desire of meriting the respect and love which were awarded to him, and which, hour by hour, were more firmly binding him to the venerable home of his childhood.

Had Mrs. Tresham been a woman of greater penetration and decision, she would have availed herself of the present opportunity for confirming her husband in sentiments and habits which would materially have added to her own happiness as well as his; but regardless, as usual, of passing circumstances, she dreamed not of their having wrought any effectual change upon the mind of Tresham, and considered his present behaviour as the result of one of the many ca-

prices by which he had repeatedly heretofore tried to stifle reflection, instead of adopting the wiser course of providing himself, by the improvement of his character and pursuits, with less painful subjects of meditation. Her pleasing and gentle manners rendered her a favourite wherever she was seen, while she was universally pitied for the ill-health which was supposed to be the sole cause of her seclusion—and as she now welcomed with her usual softness her husband's numerous guests, none could have found aught to blame, or wished to divest her of the languid grace which was the accompaniment of every word and action.

The addition to the breakfast party, it must be owned, tended little to render it more agreeable to those who were neither interested in the expected day's sport, nor in the reminiscences of olden times. Field sports and politics were the principal topics of conversation; and one of the neighbouring squires had just concluded a memo-

rable narrative of the achievements of the gun, with which he meant to commit havoc that day among the St. Austin preserves, when Mrs. Tresham, who had not heard a syllable of his discourse, and who had been meditating on the possibility of securing an uninterrupted interview with Stanley in the course of the day, addressed him in her low sweet voice, but in a tone perfectly audible to the whole party:—"You are no great sportsman, I think, Mr. Stanley, and will probably grow tired of slaying the poor birds long before your companions. When do you think you shall be at home?"—Melicent heard this question with horror as an omen of the success likely to attend Mrs. Tresham's projected lecture on morality—Stanley with pleasure, though prudence rendered his answer vague and indefinite. Tresham was annoyed—the Cornish squires looked rather surprised, yet charitably concluded it to be the fashion.

All was now confusion—guns and dogs were

to be collected, and the plans for the day finally arranged; and it was with considerable relief that the ladies at last witnessed the departure of the sportsmen. Lingering for a moment whilst the others were engaged in their preparations, Stanley whispered in a low mysterious tone to his fair hostess—"Depend upon my returning as soon as possible—I dare not refuse to accompany the boors;" and before Mrs. Tresham had time to amend, or possibly to aggravate the blunder she had committed, Stanley, with an air of unusual animation, had joined the rest of the gentlemen. "I wonder whether he is absurd enough to fancy I want him back!" thought Mrs. Tresham, as she assumed her ordinary station on the sofa. "If he only knew how I dread his return!"

The morning wore on, and Mrs. Tresham gradually forgot the task before her—it was, therefore, with no inconsiderable uneasiness that she saw Stanley enter the saloon where she was

seated alone, and not expecting the return of Mr. Tresham and his friends for hours.

"This is unlooked for good fortune!" he said, as, after looking carefully round the room, he placed himself on the sofa beside her, while she quietly rang the bell twice. "I have been for hours endeavouring to escape from the wearisome society of sportsmen about as intellectual as their dogs, and, having at last, thank heaven, succeeded, now find myself where, had I consulted my own pleasure, I should have been during the whole of the day."

"Celestine, ask Miss Wentworth, if she is not particularly engaged, to come here immediately," said his companion to the attendant who had obeyed her summons.

"What can induce you to send for Miss Wentworth?—Those tiresome girls are always in the way."

"How can you speak in that disagreeable manner of my particular friends?" asked Mrs. Tresham.

"Forgive me! I would not for the world offend you, but after I have watched, and waited, and manœuvred to see you, without your being constantly attended by those sisters, you must not expect me to be patient. How I detest young ladies!"

At this moment Melicent entered the room, happily unconscious of the cause of Mrs. Tresham's summons, and so great was her consternation at the prospect before her, that it was with difficulty she restrained herself from making a hasty retreat. As soon as she appeared, Mrs. Tresham exclaimed, "I am so glad you are come, Melicent; pray sit down by me!" Miss Wentworth, however, took her place on the opposite side of the apartment, and waited with anxiety for what was next to happen, while Stanley, annoyed at the interruption, remained silent and discontented.

"It is fortunate you were able to come back so early, Mr. Stanley," began Mrs. Tresham, de-

termined, since she was to speak, to get through her task as speedily as possible, "because I wanted so particularly to tell you that Miss Wentworth quite agrees with me in thinking your behaviour very improper."

"Miss Wentworth is most obliging!" said Stanley, looking up in astonishment. "May I enquire what part of my conduct she considers so worthy of censure?"

"Oh, there are many things that we do not like at all—I tried yesterday to tell you how much annoyed I was at your manner to me, when we are alone, but you know you would not let me speak; and when I told her afterwards all you had said, she thought it quite shocking that I should have allowed you to talk in such a way!"

"Is there anything more?" asked Stanley, darting an angry glance at Melicent, who, overpowered with confusion at the part assigned to her, sat waiting for what was to follow this pro-

mising commencement. "Pray let me hear all the charges Miss Wentworth has to bring against me."

Delighted at the unexpected patience with which he allowed her to proceed, Mrs. Tresham went on still more fluently.

"Oh, yes!—the worst of all is the way you have of speaking about Tresham—you must know how unpleasant it is to me, and what very bad taste you shew in laughing at him as you do continually. I do hope you will see how disagreeable a situation you are placing me in, and that you will alter completely, before Tresham or Frank perceive, as Miss Wentworth says they are sure to do, your excessive impertinence."

Quite satisfied with her own performance, Mrs. Tresham now leaned back complacently on her sofa, expecting Mr. Stanley's answer. He had risen while she spoke, and now stood between her and Melicent, to whom he turned as the instigator of his present humiliation.

"I have to thank you then, Miss Wentworth, for the flattering opinions which, in a manner so wholly uncalled for, you have persuaded Mrs. Tresham to express. I am sorry that she should not have been too firmly convinced of my sincere friendship and respect, to permit such insinuations to produce any effect. What your motive can be for thus accusing me, I know not, but it must be equally unworthy with the conduct which, without the slightest foundation, you would lay to my charge."

"I assure you, Mr. Stanley," interposed Mrs. Tresham, "that my own opinion of your behaviour was exactly the same before I spoke to Melicent, and it is very hard that her kindness in advising and promising to remain with me, should expose her to such rudeness."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Tresham," said Stanley, assuming a milder tone; "you cannot wonder that I should be indignant at accusations like these, although so entirely unfounded that, at a

cooler moment, they would merit disdain rather than anger. Judge for yourself, and you will see how undeserved are your reproaches. Your husband is my most valued friend, and if I have sometimes ridiculed his caprices, it has been as freely in his presence as in his absence. For you, I will not deny the unbounded admiration which I feel; but that admiration is so greatly enhanced by the sincerity and delicacy of your character, that not for worlds would I infringe the respect which is your due."

"If you always spoke as you do now, Mr. Stanley, it would be all very well; but you must be perfectly aware that this is not the case, and that Miss Wentworth is quite right, and therefore I fully agree with her in thinking it highly necessary that you should leave St. Austin's."

The rage of Stanley was now no longer to be suppressed, and in a voice so raised and angry as to make the terrified Mrs. Tresham sink back on her sofa, he cried—

"You have actually resolved then, to send me from your house!—your instigator shall repent her officious friendship!—Cold as you are, thus without emotion or regret to banish one who would shield you from your false friends and your insensible husband, you too may repent it! But I will not believe this your own doing. Miss Wentworth shall not force me from your side! I defy her utmost malice to prove the charges brought against me, and Tresham himself shall hear that vindication of my honour which his confidence demands; and, by the removal of all meddling intruders, give me satisfaction, if need be, for the insult I have received."

With these words Stanley quitted the room, where Melicent, however surprised and alarmed at finding herself, for the first time, the object of such passionate anger and sarcasm, was now called upon to exert her utmost powers of usefulness on behalf of Mrs. Tresham, who, after having shown such unusual energy, now wholly overpowered

by terror and agitation, gave way to a violent nervous attack, and was carried, completely helpless and overcome, to her chamber. Her feelings had at length been so powerfully excited that it was long before the earnest and anxious endeavours of Melicent could in the least avail to tranquillise her, or to convince her that what seemed to occasion her most alarm, Stanley's reference to Tresham, was nothing more, as her friend felt assured, than an idle boast, and that in all probability, nothing would be more carefully avoided by him.

Yielding, at last, to Melicent's consoling influence, Mrs. Tresham became comparatively composed; and it was at this time that Tresham, having accidentally encountered a servant from the Abbey, by whom he had been informed of his wife's sudden indisposition, returned home, and repaired at once to her room to inquire respecting her. Melicent, who had for a short time been absent from the side of her friend's

couch, returned on hearing Tresham's departing step, and soon after her re-entrance, Mrs. Tresham, languidly addressing her, said—

"Will you tell me what is in that note, Melicent? Celestine brought it in an hour ago, but I did not think of looking at it. Tresham actually read it all through."

Melicent lifted the letter from the table, as directed, and opened it. It proved to be from Stanley, and was composed in the same spirit of pique and ill-temper that he had recently displayed, although professedly written to apologise for the warmth which had occasioned so much alarm to Mrs. Tresham. He deprecated her displeasure, confessed that he had been hurried too far by passion at her friend's officious interference, and assured her thenceforward of his inviolable respect and submission. The slightest intimation from her own lips that his presence still occasioned her uneasiness, he would instantly obey; though he again positively refused to de-

part from St. Austin's at the suggestion or bidding of Miss Wentworth."

"Then the tiresome man is not going after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresham. "He cannot suppose that I shall tell him the same things all over again."

Melicent's countenance wore an expression of still greater dismay than her friend's, as, still holding the paper, she enquired, "Did you not say that Mr. Tresham read this note? Is it possible that he made no remark?"

"He did not say a word, but laid it down and quietly went away. Melicent, I never thought of that—he is gone to Stanley, and there will be a duel! For Heaven's sake prevent their meeting!"

Any measures which Melicent might have adopted for this purpose, were for the time effectually prevented by the alarming nervous paroxysms, brought on by extreme agitation, which now seized Mrs. Tresham, and rendered

it impossible to leave her. The moment she was able, she hastened in search of Mr. Tresham, but he was not to be found; Stanley also had disappeared; and with this unsatisfactory intelligence, she was obliged to return to her friend, whose agony of terror encreased every instant. A second mission of enquiry undertaken by her some time afterwards, met at first with no better success; until on encountering Tresham's own man, she ascertained from him that his master had left the house half an hour before to rejoin the sportsmen, and that he was then certainly alone. Unwilling to excite curiosity by repeating her enquiries respecting Stanley, she was forced to be satisfied with Phillips's promise to acquaint Mr. Tresham, as soon as he returned home, with Miss Wentworth's request to see him; and with this slight consolation, to rejoin his wife, who now, at least, shewed none of the insensibility of which she had so often been accused.

Late in the day, they at last listened to the

welcome sounds of the return of the sportsmen, and soon afterwards Miss Wentworth received the long desired intimation that Mr. Tresham was expecting her in the library.

With sensations very like those of a culprit, Melicent hastened to the apartment indicated, and almost trembling as she thought of her friend's anxiety, and really momentous situation, she waited for an instant at the door, before she could gain courage to open it. Mr. Tresham was standing, leaning against the mantle-piece, as she entered, but he at once advanced to meet her, and took her hand with affectionate respect. Melicent saw by his countenance that he had been much agitated, and her fears returning, she could at first scarcely speak. Tresham, however, broke silence by saying, "Phillips told me that you desired to see me, Miss Wentworth?"

"Oh, Mr. Tresham," said Melicent, "you know not how you have terrified us! What is become of Mr. Stanley?"

—Tresham forced a smile; "There is no occasion for uneasiness, I assure you, my dear Miss Wentworth. Stanley is gone, and I am the bearer of his apologies for having, as he says, in the heat of the moment, expressed himself unwarrantably towards you. I trust there was no greater cause of offence given you than he acknowledges, or I shall regret having suffered him to depart unpunished for his insolence."

"Then Mr. Stanley is indeed gone! and I may relieve Mrs. Tresham from the dreadful apprehensions on your account under which she has been suffering for several hours."

"Stanley left the house before I myself rejoined my friends. My wife's anxiety is, you may assure her, perfectly groundless."

"Will you not tell her so yourself?—your presence, though but for a moment, will do more than I can to reassure her. Her nerves have received a severe shock, and the anxiety and uneasiness to which she has now for several

days been exposed, have been greater than stronger health than hers could endure, without giving away."

"I am sorry to hear it, and fear that your kindness and friendship are indeed most severely taxed; they will doubtless, however, on this occasion, prove of more efficacy to Mrs. Tresham than my presence, which I am now compelled to bestow upon my guests. Tell my wife," he continued, perceiving that Melicent hesitated, "that she need fear no farther annoyance, and that I will see her to-morrow; and forgive me, Miss Wentworth, if I cannot at this moment express as I ought the deep sense of obligation which I entertain towards you."

CHAPTER IV.

"You leave me deeply affected, Mr. Stanley ;—
William ! be ready to open the door.

SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL.

The sun shone clear and bright through Melicent's casements, when, after passing the night in dreaming of a succession of deeds and fainting-fits, she determined to try whether the fresh autumnal air would not assist in dissipating the uneasiness occasioned by the events of the preceding day. Leaving the Abbey, she entered the beautiful flower-garden, and selecting a sunny walk, bordered by the gay flowers of the season, she surrendered her-

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self to earnest reflection upon the most advisable mode of rendering assistance to her friend in her present distress, and of vindicating, as far as it was possible, the conduct by which it was evident that her husband had been wounded and incensed. It was with considerable surprise that, at a turn in the walk, she saw Mr. Tresham advancing to meet her, and she could not help imagining that this unusual restlessness on his part was to be attributed to what had passed, the recollection of which must tend so materially to alter his previous opinion of the incapability of his indolent wife to feel or excite emotion. His air was still unusually grave, as, after accosting and joining Miss Wentworth, he walked on for a few moments in silence by her side.

"I can never thank you sufficiently, Miss Wentworth," he at length observed, "for the assistance and support you have afforded to Mrs. Tresham. Your generosity in endeavour-

ing to screen her from the consequences of conduct so blameable, so opposite to your own sense of what is right, ought not to have met in return with annoyance such as, I fear, Stanley has occasioned you. Had I done more than glance at the letter to which his hand-writing attracted my attention, I should hardly have had enough command over my temper to dismiss him so quietly after his rudeness to one whom he ought to have known how to respect."

"However disinclined I may be to take Mr. Stanley's part," replied Melicent, "I cannot feel surprised at his being provoked at having me as a witness of Mrs. Tresham's deserved rebuke of his presumption, and openly expressed desire for his departure."

"Say, rather, Miss Wentworth, from his justly concluding that Mrs. Tresham's tardy sense of propriety had been inspired by the firmness of her friend. I do not wonder that

Mr. Stanley should feel greater displeasure at your share in his humiliation than at that of Mrs. Tresham."

"Indeed you are wrong; my share consisted merely in remaining with your wife, in order to prevent Mr. Stanley's taking advantage of her being alone to confuse and distress her by his fluent protestations, as he had done upon her first attempt to express her opinion of his conduct."

"Mr. Stanley must still, however, have felt, as I do most painfully, that the first idea of the necessity of checking his audacity, had probably originated with Miss Wentworth."

"Pardon me, it was your wife who first, to my surprise, informed me of the uneasiness she felt at Mr. Stanley's behaviour, and of her wish to put an end to it by some more decided step, as she had tried in vain to repress it by the coldness of her manner."

Tresham was silent, but his colour rose, and

Melicent feared she had gone too far in revealing Stanley's offences. He made no remark, however, but after a short pause replied.

"I am not inclined to blame Mrs. Tresham too severely, although I should imagine that few women would not know how, when really desiring it, to check such advances. On the contrary, I feel that I am myself far the more culpable. Knowing the unfortunate weakness of Mrs. Tresham's character, I ought to have prevented her being exposed to a similar trial; but suspicion and jealousy are abhorrent to my disposition:—Stanley was an old friend; though I knew him to be a dissipated man, I fancied him strictly honourable, and the confidence I placed in my wife's delicacy and propriety, made me attribute her carelessness upon some occasions to ignorance of evil, and consider her artlessness of character a sufficient safeguard."

"And you were perfectly right, I am con

vinced, in your opinion of Mrs. Tresham; it seems to me, indeed, that there is no great cause for wonder at your gentle wife's not knowing how to repress attentions to which her retiring manners could never before have exposed her. Though you give me credit for so much ability in conducting the affair, I cannot say that I feel at all proud of it; and had you not taken the management into your own hands, Mr. Stanley would, in all probability, be still at St. Austin's, and my poor friend and myself in worse perplexity than ever."

"Thanks, Miss Wentworth, in that friend's name, for your favourable interpretation! Believe me, I am truly rejoiced that my wife was aware of the necessity of dismissing Stanley, although her weakness led her to place her kind friend in so painful a situation. But I must now return to my guests, who probably think me anything but an attentive or agreeable host."

"You will not forget that Mrs. Tresham

expects to see you this morning? I fear you will find her nervous and agitated; but she is most anxious to express her gratitude for your consideration in dismissing Mr. Stanley without exciting remark or curiosity among your guests and domestics. Pray, therefore, do not fail to visit her."

"Certainly, if Mrs. Tresham wishes it, and is well enough to see me, I shall make a point of doing so."

These last words were spoken as they entered the hall; and Melicent, leaving Tresham to rejoin his friends, proceeded to his wife's apartment, to prepare her for the approaching interview.

After the lapse of about an hour, Tresham came up to the dressing-room, where he was awaited by his wife and Melicent, whom she would not suffer to leave her. Tresham's look and tone, however austere at his first entrance, relaxed on seeing the tears which his usually

placid wife could not restrain; and he expressed with kindness his concern that she should have suffered so much from the excitement and annoyances of the previous day.

"I hope Melicent has told you how very much obliged I am to you for getting me out of all my difficulties so well," said Mrs. Tresham, as soon as she could command herself to speak, but still in hurried and faltering accents. "I really do not wonder that you are angry with me for making you and Melicent so very uncomfortable, and all without its being of the slightest use, and then having to give you the trouble of sending Stanley away at last. I am afraid you must have found it very tiresome and disagreeable."

Tresham smiled as he answered, "I assure you, I found it the easiest thing in the world to express to Mr. Stanley that his further presence here could be dispensed with. You have

therefore no great cause for gratitude on that score."

"Oh, yes! I have: since you have done it so well, and without making half the disturbance that I did. What a relief it would have been, Melicent, if we had ventured to ask him to speak to Stanley for me!—since even with you to assist me I did it all wrong."

"Oh, do not talk of my assistance! I only sat quietly by and listened to your lecture; and I do not think we behaved at all creditably, or should have done any good without Mr. Tresham."

"That is just what I mean. I remember that I did not intend to mention your name at all, as you so particularly requested, and after all I was so frightened that I laid it all upon you, and that made Stanley so very rude."

"Upon my word, Miss Wentworth," said Tresham, amused in spite of himself at his wife's

account, "you seem to have been most awkwardly situated. I do not envy you."

"Indeed poor Melicent has had every sort of annoyance about this silly affair, when of course I ought to have been the only sufferer, as it was all my fault. If it had not been for you both, what would have become of me? I should have gone on bewildering myself about the man's impertinence, and the danger of you or Frank finding it out, and only grown more helpless and known less what to do than ever."

"It should have been my care," said Tresham, gravely, "to shield you from any risk of the kind. I ought to have had more consideration than to have allowed such a man as Stanley to be constantly in my house. But you had not taught me to keep a very strict guard—henceforth I find that I must be more vigilant."

"Oh! I should not mind such a thing so much now, because I know that you would help me;—besides, Stanley is never likely to come

back again, and no one else would be ridiculous enough to make love to me."

Completely relieved from all fear that his wife might have given any intentional encouragement to her forward admirer, Tresham replied, as he left her,

"There is now no cause, Laura, for uneasiness. My own negligence renders me as culpable towards you as Stanley, whose insolence I refrain, on your account, from farther chastising. If you would have me forgive myself, you must not suffer this excitement materially to affect your health. Do not think of the past, but let us join in manifesting our lasting gratitude to the unparalleled friend whose kindness has been so severely tried."

"Forget what has passed!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresham, with more energy than Melicent had believed her to possess, as he closed the door. "Weak and ill as I am, I never felt so happy in my life! Tell me, dearest Melicent, how I

can repay him for kindness so wholly undeserved. Teach me to make him happy—to be worthy of the esteem and love of one so noble and so generous."

CHAPTER V.

" And art thou come back safe again
From over the salt sea ?
Hark ! the bells ring their merriest peal
To hail and welcome thee !"

MISS MITFORD.

" You have no idea, Tresham, how tiresome and disagreeable Melicent has been making herself this morning," said Mrs. Tresham, a few days afterwards, as she assumed her place at the dinner-table. " She has been talking about Sir Arthur's wanting Isabel and herself at home again, and of his having actually written to fix a day next week for their return ;—and, if

you do not prevent it, I really believe she means to go away!"

"Indeed," said Melicent, "our own inclination would detain us at St. Austin's, were that alone to be consulted; but we should be inexcusable were we to hesitate in obeying the summons of my uncle, since it is made on no less important an occasion than that of Mr. Wentworth's return. A complete reconciliation, I am happy to find, has taken place between them; and we are recalled expressly to assist in welcoming back my cousin after his long absence."

"An important occasion, indeed!" remarked Tresham; "and one which, however reluctantly we may admit it, must, I fear, supersede any claim of ours. I trust, nevertheless, that the period for losing you is not so near as Mrs. Tresham apprehends?"

"Next Wednesday is the time beyond which our journey must not be delayed. My uncle writes that he has fixed Thursday for Mr. Went-

worth's return, as the anniversary of his birth-day; and particularly requests that we will not disappoint him by failing to be there to receive him."

"You are, then, going home purposely to see your cousin?" whispered Lord Lymington to Isabel. "How unmercifully Hopkinson would quiz you were he here!"

"For our sakes, Miss Wentworth," said Tresham, "I could almost have wished that Sir Arthur had persisted longer in his resentment, since its close takes you from us;—but, setting such selfish considerations apart, I have become sufficiently interested in Lymington's friend, Mr. Wentworth, to rejoice at this termination of his disgrace."

"I do not pretend to be anything but selfish," said his wife; "and I should not care whether Mr. Wentworth were in Spain, or in China, or at Wentworth Court, so that he were not the means of taking his cousins from St. Austin's."

The regret of the Miss Wentworths at their approaching departure from St. Austin's was, in fact, scarcely less than that of its owners at the prospect of losing their society. A great and beneficial alteration had been produced by the dismissal of Mr. Stanley, upon the several inmates of the Abbey; and, relieved from the presence of one they so much disliked, time passed very pleasantly to Melicent and Isabel, during the last days of their stay in Cornwall, either in long walks and rides, favoured by the fine mornings of early September, or in the company of those to whom they were growing more and more attached. Mrs. Tresham's health had greatly improved since the renovation her spirits had undergone;—even her mind appeared invigorated by the consciousness of powers and emotions till now unfelt; while her increased animation added yet more to the interest she was acquiring with Tresham, and which he had deemed her incapable of inspiring.

Her brother, proud of the decision she had, as he supposed, displayed in so completely discouraging Stanley as to induce him to leave St. Austin's, treated her with more affection than ever; and all tended to confirm her desire of meriting his good opinion, and winning the love and confidence of her husband.

At an unusually early hour, on the morning of the Miss Wentworths' departure, Mrs. Tresham entered Melicent's dressing-room; and replied to her expressions of concern for being the means of thus disturbing her, by saying,

"Oh, my dear, how is it possible for me to sleep when I have to consider what is to become of us after you are gone away, and we have nothing to do but to be miserable? Tresham will never endure it;—he will leave the place, and be more unsettled than ever; when, if you had but stayed, he would have been so well amused and satisfied here."

"He will be so still, believe me. You have

only to exert yourself as you have done during the last few days,—which I am certain you have found so pleasant,—and there is no danger, in my opinion, of Mr. Tresham's present mode of life becoming distasteful to him."

"I am very glad you think so, and I know you are always right; but then Frank, too, is going to leave us soon, and Tresham will have no one but me."

"That is exactly what will best make you understand each other," said Melicent. "You will then, I am convinced, study his gratification, without depending on others for assistance; and, if you fear absolute solitude, you must enter more into society, or, at least, encourage his doing so."

"Will you tell me, then, what to do about this note?" said Mrs. Tresham, looking at one she held in her hand. "It has combined with your going away, to keep me awake all night."

"It is not, I hope, from Mr. Stanley?" inquired Melicent, in some alarm.

"Oh no, my dear!—only from Mrs. Penruddock, the wife of Tresham's friend, the new member, containing, alas! an invitation to pass a week with them at some place with one of those terrible Cornish names."

"And you will accept it, I trust, and thus surprise and please Mr. Tresham?" said Melicent.

"I was afraid you would say I ought to go. Tresham gave me the note last night, saying that he supposed I should not choose to accept it; and that he certainly would not leave me so soon after your departure. That was very kind, was it not?"

"Yes; and I am glad that you mean to reward him by allowing yourself to be admired and fêted by the Cornish magnates."

"Well, Melicent, since you think it right, I will go," said Mrs. Tresham, as they descended

the stairs together. "I will accompany Tresham, and try to make myself agreeable, if I can. At all events you shall not accuse me of acting contrary to your opinion, on the last opportunity I shall have for so long of applying to you for advice and encouragement."

The last repast of the sisters at St. Austin's was, as might be supposed, a mournful one; and even Lord Lymington's vivacity appeared wholly to have deserted him. "Tell Maximilian," he said, as he followed them through the hall, "that though at present I cannot fully sympathise with his good fortune, yet I will congratulate him in person as soon as the wind will allow the Falcon to regain her old moorings in Comerford Haven." Melicent assured him most sincerely of the pleasure his visit would confer on all at Wentworth Court; and as, after an affectionate farewell from Tresham and his wife, the sisters at length crossed the threshold of the venerable abbey, and gazed for the last time

on the beautiful river, and the woods glowing with the thousand varied tints of autumn, even Isabel's regret was but little decreased by the thought that the morrow was to see the Maximilian who had created so much interest, restored to his rightful home, and relinquishing the wild pursuits of his heedless youth to enter upon a career more befitting his station as the heir of so noble and ancient a family.

Everything at Wentworth Court seemed to have assumed a different aspect during the absence of Melicent and Isabel; one feeling appeared to reign in every breast—of gladness at the expected return of Mr. Wentworth, and all was joyful confusion. But the greatest alteration had been wrought upon the venerable owner of the mansion; Sir Arthur's step was firmer, his smile less clouded; the assurance that his name would be worthily supported in after years, seemed to have removed every care, and his happiness was complete when he had

his nieces again at his side, and perceived the beneficial effect of the late change of air upon his delicate Isabel. "Now all my anxieties are over!" he exclaimed, as he received them. "Tomorrow will behold Maximilian at Wentworth Court; no longer the unthinking boy, who formerly caused me so much uneasiness, but fully convinced, at last, of the folly and mischief of the tenets inculcated by his unfortunate education, and for the future, disposed, I trust, firmly to maintain the principles for which his ancestors have freely sacrificed their nearest and dearest interests. I have waited for you with anxiety, and should have been grieved at your absence on so proud and happy a day as tomorrow. You must wear your brightest smiles to cheer our poor exile, whom I must strive to reward for all the hardships he has undergone. How different is the manly and affectionate letter which expresses his regret for all the causes for resentment he had given

me, to that wherein with such reckless levity he laid the foundation for our long estrangement! But, henceforth, we will have no retrospection; —the heir of the Wentworths returns to the home of his forefathers, all that my fondest hopes could imagine;—and I can now cheerfully look forward to the period when Maximilian, aware of the real dignity of his position in society, will secure the welfare of my tenantry, and uphold in his ancestral dwelling the hereditary customs which he will recollect to have been dear to him whose place he will then occupy, the friend and guardian of his youth."

A brilliant autumnal sun gilded the day which was to witness Mr. Wentworth's re-appearance on the scene where he was so ardently expected. Tables were spread in the park, where the numerous tenantry were feasted in honour of their future patron, and the old domestics, with Ambrose at their head, sought by all imaginable devices to please and gratify one

who was universally a favourite. Within the stately withdrawing room, as the appointed hour drew on when the hero of the day might be expected, assembled a large and somewhat formal party, consisting of those of the neighbouring families who having known Maximilian from his boyhood, were most likely to be interested in his reconciliation with Sir Arthur. Many of them were strangers to Melicent and Isabel, and it was with some difficulty that the latter could assume the composure necessary for receiving her uncle's guests, when every moment might bring the cousin who, while yet a stranger, had acquired such interest in her eyes. Lady Clarence and Mr. Walsingham, Sir Frederick and Lady Latimer, the Lamberts and Severns, had arrived, and Mrs. Severn was gracefully expatiating to Sir Arthur on Mr. Severn's regret at being kept away from a *réunion* of such peculiar and joyful interest, by that terrible English malady, the gout, when Mrs. Lambert,

pulling Isabel by the sleeve, whispered to her, "Take my advice, and don't let yourself be cut out! Any body may see through this, for we all know Maria Severn was dying for love of your cousin before he went abroad, and a fine match he would be for her; since her father's property is every shilling entailed, and must go to the brother. Mrs. Severn is clever enough, but I don't think she will take in Max!"

Isabel glanced with an increase of interest towards the love-sick Maria, whose countenance really betrayed some emotion when the sound of a fresh equipage driving along the approach, gave rise to a false alarm respecting Mr. Wentworth's arrival. A few minutes afterwards, the Earl of Chellingham was announced—a nobleman whose absence from the country, for the purpose of fulfilling his parliamentary duties, had prevented his being previously known to the Miss Wentworths. The possessor of the most splendid demesne, and decidedly the most

influential person in the northern division of the county, Lord Chellingham had exerted himself to pay this distant visit in honour of Mr. Wentworth, who, as the representative of Sir Arthur, might be expected to have a weight in political and local business, which his lordship was eager to secure for his own party. Scarcely had she gone through a presentation to this stately individual, when Isabel found herself seized upon by the elder Miss Severn, as she retreated towards the sofa occupied by the interesting Maria, with the view of securing at least the luxury of silence.

"What beautiful things for the guitar Mr. Wentworth will bring you from Spain!—He is so musical, and such a delightful creature in every way!—I quite envy you the change his being here will make, and the pleasure of having a cousin always ready to ride or to walk or sing with you. Now brothers are seldom very accommodating, but Mr. Wentworth is exactly

the kind of person one likes to have constantly about one."

"Poor Wentworth will have no sinecure!" said her brother, overhearing her. "Sir Arthur and Lord Chellingham are already carving out political engagements for him, while you ladies are devising avocations of another nature. Accustomed to the delicious freedom of the continent, he will certainly never survive all these machinations against his peace!"

"Maria and I used to like to sing with your cousin of all things, before he went abroad," resumed Miss Severn. "We have missed him terribly at Oaklands lately. I assure you that you will find him a most charming person; and his singing is quite exquisite!"

The curiosity and anxiety of Isabel rose higher at every moment,—every sound made her start, and her confusion became overpowering, when, after being forced to apologise for her absence of mind in saying exactly the contrary to what

she had intended in answer to a question of Walsingham's, she heard Mrs. Lambert laughingly remark,—"Ah! well, Mr. Walsingham will excuse it! No wonder if Miss Isabel is thinking of her cousin; I believe we are none of us quite in our right minds to-day from expecting him!" All attention, however, was, fortunately, diverted from her by the loud shouts and cheering which suddenly arose from the peasantry without, as a travelling carriage drove rapidly through the park. Sir Arthur, in great emotion, hurried out to be the first to greet his long absent nephew; and when, after the lapse of a few moments, he re-entered the apartment, the crowding of all present towards the door, combined with Isabel's extreme embarrassment to prevent her being able to distinguish his companion. Words would be inadequate to describe her consternation, when, on hearing Melicent, in reply to the few affectionate words whereby Sir Arthur accompanied his presenta-

tion of her cousin, simply exclaim, "Mr. Hopkinson!"—she, for the first time, lifted her eyes to the form and features she had invested with so many romantic embellishments, and perceived, with a shudder, that Maximilian Wentworth, and the odious Inspector of the Mines, were undeniably one and the same.

CHAPTER VI.

"A Clifford to his home restored!"

WORDSWORTH.

IT was fortunate for poor Isabel that this discovery occurred before her own introduction to her now disenchanted hero, since, even with the advantage of the interval allowed for preparation and recovery before Sir Arthur advanced towards herself, after Mr. Wentworth had, in a few words, acknowledged having already presented himself to his cousins under an assumed character, the good old baronet was yet surprised and distressed at the cold and embarrassed air with which his pretty favourite received his

beloved nephew. All, however, were pressing round Maximilian with congratulations; and, amidst the general excitement, she was able to conceal, in some degree, her surprise and mortification.

Scarcely had these unpleasant feelings subsided, when she found herself placed beside Mr. Walsingham at the dinner table; and, determined not to suffer Maximilian to perceive how much she was annoyed at the success of the scheme, whereby it was evident that Lord Lymington and he had amused themselves with quizzing her romantic ideas of her unknown cousin, she exerted herself to the utmost, to appear animated and unconcerned; while, whatever might by Walsingham be considered the cause which had heightened her colour, and lent brilliancy to her smiles, she had, at all events, never seemed so lovely in his eyes, as on the day which had witnessed the downfall of her highly raised expectations.

Had Mr. Wentworth appeared to her in any other light, than that of the individual of the straw hat and duckhunter, Isabel might have been interested by the evident emotion with which he resumed his accustomed place at the foot of Sir Arthur's hospitable board; but sentiment and Hopkinson were wholly incongruous, and she was far too angry to admit that, as she now saw him, Maximilian bore as little resemblance as possible to the facetious Inspector, that his manners were remarkably quiet and gentlemanly, and his countenance particularly pleasing. One thought of her drive in Lord Lymington's phaeton, of his comic songs, in which, according to Miss Severn, she was henceforth to take part, was sufficient to banish all favourable ideas of Mr. Wentworth, and to provoke her against herself for not having perceived the malicious intentions of the two friends.

While Sir Arthur, delighted with the atten-

tion and respect paid by all his guests to his nephew, exerted himself in every possible way to testify the gratification his return inspired, Lord Chellingham, after waiting for a pause in the numerous demands on Maximilian's notice, at length, seizing his opportunity, leaned forward, and addressed him upon the subject uppermost in his own thoughts, in a manner so emphatic, and tone so elevated, as to suspend the different conversations going on around the table.

"It is not alone for the sake of my worthy and honourable friend, Sir Arthur Wentworth," began the Earl, "that I welcome with sincere and heartfelt joy the return of his nephew to the county of Devon. Most sacred, most dear to my heart, are the interests of that district: and I look forward with confidence, to the beneficial and highly advantageous influence again to be exercised, by a member of this ancient family, in favour of the cause for which

his ancestors have repeatedly bled, and which at the present alarming and perillous crisis every gentleman is powerfully and energetically called upon to sustain. I venture to entreat Mr. Wentworth, therefore, to prove how sincerely and strenuously he espouses that cause, by attending and presiding at one of those glorious associations now so frequent throughout the country; and where the presence of a representative of the house of Wentworth is most earnestly requested and desired; a meeting which I hail as a manifestation out of many thousand others of the prevalence among the British people of that spirit, to which alone they can look for the support of their social, religious, and political rights; and for their rescue from the strange and unnatural combination of hostile influences by which they are threatened and assailed!"

"Lord Chellingham has been informing me, Maximilian," said Sir Arthur, in explanation, "that a wish has been expressed for one of the

Wentworths to assume the chair at the Conservative dinner, at Comerford, on Monday next. I trust that you will accept an honour which my own infirmities oblige me, however reluctantly, to decline.

While Sir Arthur and Lord Chellingham fixed their eyes upon Mr. Wentworth, in anxious expectation of his reply, the latter caught those of Melicent, regarding him with an expression fully indicative of her amusement at the novel and dignified character assigned to him. He replied, notwithstanding, quietly and gravely, that although he should be happy to attend the meeting in question, he still could not but consider himself disqualified, by his long absence, from adequately representing his uncle in so important an office as the one mentioned.

"Pardon me, Mr. Wentworth!" rejoined the Earl, in his most courteous manner. "It is to you, more particularly, that, on this present occasion, our friends look for that countenance

and support which, until Sir Arthur's withdrawal and secession from public meetings, they have been accustomed to receive from the head of your family. Of course, the request will be made through an official medium, and I sincerely trust it will not meet with a refusal."

Mr. Wentworth bowed his acknowledgment, and his attention was again required by Sir Arthur.

"Lady Latimer tells me, Maximilian, that Sir Frederick and herself are expecting our friends the Comptons to-morrow, at Danesfield. I am sorry that they should not have arrived in time to give you the meeting. There is no one, on whose kind interest in me and mine I could more depend than your sister, Sir Frederick, although her highly commendable attention to her daughter's education has, of late years, prevented our seeing her in Devonshire as frequently as I could have wished."

"Their present visit to us is likely, I find,

to be but of brief duration," replied Sir Frederick. "I believe, Lady Latimer, I am justified in revealing the facts communicated to us in my sister's letter. My niece, whom we, Sir Arthur, regard almost as a child, is about to change her name for one not wholly unknown to you. Alice is engaged, we understand, to the brother of your friend Mrs. Tresham, of St. Austin's; and I need scarcely tell you that such a match offers every prospect of matrimonial felicity, since Colonel Lindesay, besides being a man of the highest possible character, has large estates in Argyleshire, and belongs to one of the first families in Scotland."

"Even at the risk of being accused of partiality," observed Lady Latimer, "I must say, that I believe Alice to be fully worthy of her present good fortune; her mother's unremitting attention deserved the success it has met with. Alice has been admirably brought up, and every one who has lately seen her assures me,

that her great beauty is really her least recommendation."

"I am glad to hear such an account of my young friend," said Sir Arthur; "I was always pleased with her dutiful submission to her father; in which excellent quality, by the bye, your sister, Sir Frederick, held forth so good an example for her daughter's imitation."

"If we want to be comfortable," whispered Mrs. Lambert across her next neighbour to Melicent, "I am sure I hope we are not going to talk about Mr. Compton! He really is the most overbearing, disagreeable man that ever breathed, and if his wife were not the sweetest-tempered woman in the world, she never could live with him. I quite pity poor Lady Latimer for what she will have to go through while he stays."

"What did you tell me, Maximilian, when you first came in," said Sir Arthur, in the eve-

ning, addressing his nephew, "about having introduced yourself to your cousins in Cornwall, under a different character to your own?"

"How like Mr. Wentworth!" exclaimed Mrs. Severn. "Let us all entreat to have our curiosity gratified, since I, for one, am dying to know the romantic disguise adopted for the occasion. Some wandering minstrel, doubtless, or interesting Spanish exile! And they did not discover him till his appearance here to day? So admirably *en regle!*"

"Mr. Wentworth's disguise was of a far more presumptuous nature than you have imagined," said Melicent. "He actually passed himself off upon our inexperience for a most influential person in the county, and we believed him to have attained the rank of an Inspector of the Mines, which are there considered of so much consequence."

"How very odd! What could make you think of that, Max? I hoped you had become

too steady for such wild schemes," said the astonished Sir Arthur; while Isabel secretly thought that he would have been anywhere more in his proper position than in personifying her romantic Maximilian. Unable to elude her uncle's desire that she should sing, she chose her opportunity to hurry through the most mournful ditty in her possession, while the object of her alarm was engaged at the other end of the room, in colloquy with Lord Chellingham. Her escape from the piano-forte, and from the elaborate encomiums of Mrs. Severn, upon "the simplicity of style so admirably in contrast with the showy manner at present in vogue, which her girls had unfortunately contracted from their long residence abroad," was adroitly covered by Walsingham, whom in gratitude, she suffered to station himself by her side,—and, animated by the willing attention of one so lovely and so gentle, to exert in conversation with her the powers of pleasing which he

abundantly possessed, and which had, at least, the welcome effect of banishing for the time from her recollection, the distressing events of the day.

"Well, Melicent!" exclaimed Isabel, in a melancholy tone, after she and her sister had retired for the night. "What think you of the lamentable conclusion to all our highly raised expectations, and of the acquisition made to-day to the family circle?

"It must be acknowledged, that our cousin seems unlikely to enact the exalted part you assigned to him," Melicent laughingly replied. "On the contrary, from what we have seen, his forte lies in the ludicrous, and if he favours us with many more such antics, we shall at all events not find him a dull companion."

"Oh no!" sighed poor Isabel; "I know exactly how he will behave; as soon as he fancies himself on intimate terms with us, which

will, I fear, be only too soon, we shall never know what quiet is again: of course he is fond of all kinds of practical jokes, and we shall be frightened out of our senses, by some of Master Maximilian's witty pranks!"

"Really, Isabel, you are too disheartening! Let us hope that our cousin, being decidedly a gentleman, may possibly prove more refined in his amusements; though I fear there is no doubt as to his being of a very facetious turn of mind."

"Of course he is!—I little thought when I was so delighted at getting rid of Mr. Hopkinson, that I should be doomed to spend months, perhaps years, in his society! I never was anxious to be married before."

"Confess that not a few of the smiles you so liberally bestowed in another quarter to-day, were owing to your recent disappointment. I am inclined to think, that had Mr. Wentworth continued in exile, Mr. Walsingham would still

have been regarded as an uninteresting personage."

"I never thought Mr. Walsingham uninteresting," Isabel gravely replied; "far from it; and had our cousin resembled him,—but what a difference!"

"Indeed, Isabel, you are unjust to Mr. Wentworth, because he, perhaps, does not realise your romantic expectations. You cannot deny, that he supported his fictitious character most admirably, and if he might not laugh at himself, on whom would you have him exercise his jesting propensities?"

"I only hope it will not be on me! but I do not know why I should be unjust, as you call it. The poor man cannot help, I suppose, his unfortunate inclination to be comical."

"Isabel, you are positively incorrigible. Say what you will, I like our cousin; and his behaviour to-day to his uncle and his friends, seemed to me every thing that could be wished."

"Really, Melicent, you are worse than Miss Maria Severn, who is actually in love with the man! Of course he looked better without his straw hat and duckhunter, but who can tell how soon he may resume them, with the rest of his absurdities?"

"Only think how much he must have been amused with the whole thing! Now I understand his sentimentality during our morning walk. Poor Max was really sorry that he had offended you, and you see he has fulfilled his engagement of giving up his profession to please you."

"Well, I will endeavour to return the obligation, by reconciling my uncle to his match with Jemima. Indeed I think they will suit each other admirably, and it would be cruel to let the noble Maximilian pine away the victim of an unfortunate attachment. Good night, Milly,—I hope I shall not dream of him!" and with these words, Isabel left her sister to medi-

tate upon the change wrought on all her ideas and opinions, and to hope that she might, if possible, escape the slightest attempt at jocularity from the interesting Mr. Wentworth.

CHAPTER VII.

" It was a mad fantastical trick of him to steal from the state, and usurp the beggary he was never born to."

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THE guests of the preceding day were all departed, and Isabel was alone in the drawing-room, when in the afternoon Mr. Walsingham entered, having ridden over from Marchwood, to call upon Mr. Wentworth.

" I am come," he said, " as in duty bound, to pay my court to the reinstated hero. How is it that I find you in solitude, Miss Wentworth ? I should have imagined that Sir Arthur would

not dispense with either you or your sister, in his anxiety to add to the *agrémens* of the home to which he has restored his favourite.

"Melicent is with Sir Arthur, doing the honours of the grounds, and pointing out the recent alterations to Mr. Wentworth," replied Isabel. "There is not the least probability of my absence being noticed, for I believe that scarcely a creature in the house has a thought to throw away upon any one else."

"I have often thought lately," said Walsingham, "that Maximilian is one of those fortunate beings with whom every thing prospers. Unlooked for events rendered him Sir Arthur's heir,—the representative of one of our oldest families, and the future possessor of Wentworth Court. His buoyant temper and openness of disposition, have won him golden opinions from all men;—and now, as if to remove the slight want of interest which might by the young and romantic, be considered as attendant upon such

unclouded prosperity, his own follies stand his friend, and he returns to his ancestral domain and future heritage, not perhaps, with conquered nations at his chariot wheels, but with romance enough accruing from his long banishment, to render him an extremely eligible hero! He returns, too, to find Wentworth Court infinitely changed—infinitely improved—and to be welcomed by those who are already the most interested in his destiny, and prepossessed in his favour. Under such brilliant auspices, who would not envy Mr. Wentworth?"

"You must be laughing at me, Mr. Walsingham," exclaimed Isabel. "You must have heard how ridiculous I have made myself about Mr. Wentworth, or you would never have talked of him so exactly as my foolish imagination had pictured my absent cousin;—so different from the reality! Banished, unseen, the Maximilian whose name was a prohibited sound at Wentworth Court, was quite as interesting as

you have described. But he ought to have remained in Spain, if he wished to appear in a favourable light. After our first meeting, all romance faded from a person who will always recall to my recollection the most absurdly disagreeable scenes wherein I have been ever unlucky enough to take part."

The curiosity of Walsingham soon extracted from Isabel an account of her tour in Cornwall; the incidents on the road, and at Penzance, were detailed greatly to his amusement and Isabel's, who now could not refrain from laughing over her former perplexities.

"I am not sure that I should so easily forgive Lord Lymington, with whom I suspect the plan originated," observed Walsingham, as she concluded.

"Oh no!—the idea of Mr. Hopkinson must have belonged to the individual who could so well enact him; but I really think I ought to feel infinitely obliged to both the authors of my

mystification, for so completely curing me of my inclination to be romantic, and securing me so effectually from all danger of falling a victim to Mr. Wentworth's fascinations."

"There are few men who would have been inclined to ridicule your interest in their fate," said Walsingham; "you must not suppose every one to be of the opinion of Lord Lymington and his friend. But I need not fear the threatened consequence of their malicious scheme: yours is the romance of a pure and innocent mind,—of feelings elevated and noble, as they are gentle and compassionate,—of a vivid imagination, investing objects with a beauty not their own indeed, but inseparable from the medium through which they are viewed. I cannot imitate Mr. Wentworth in classing such enthusiasm with the common-place sentimentalities of the boarding-school young ladies, who might really have profited by his facetiousness; nor can such ill-directed raillery make you re-

sign a charm inherent to your nature, which must lose its whole identity, before it learns to regard the world and its inhabitants in their unvarnished colours."

"Not ready yet, Isabel?" inquired Sir Arthur, who at that moment made his appearance. "This is kind and friendly in you, Mr. Walsingham, to come and welcome my dear boy again so soon," he added, on perceiving who was her companion;—"but why did you stay here? Max and Melicent are at variance about the new lodge; and I want Isabel to decide that it shall be as he wishes. I had no idea that you were keeping her within doors, when you have seen her any day you pleased all the time she has been here; while poor Max, who has not been at Wentworth Court since the dear girl came, has been asking for her at least twenty times."

Apologising for having detained her, though unable to repress a smile at the expression of

annoyance on Isabel's countenance, Walsingham rose to accompany Sir Arthur, who immediately led the way to the hall; where, under cover of a long narrative of Mr. Wentworth's adventures, Isabel contrived to effect her escape,—insensible, for the moment, even to the pain of displeasing her uncle,—anything was better than to be compelled to grace the triumph of her cousin, whom she was determined to view in no other light than that of the disagreeable Inspector. It was in vain that in manner and appearance Maximilian had resumed the tone befitting his rank;—she beheld him still in the unfortunate garb which had disfigured his well-formed person and intellectual countenance at their first meeting; and heard in the voice, now modulated in a manner peculiarly agreeable to less prejudiced ears, only the facetious accents by which Mr. Hopkinson had so often excited her indignation. Even Melicent, for the first time, incurred some portion of her anger, by

the readiness with which she gave up her dislike, and by her provokingly sitting so much longer than usual after breakfast, instead of leaving him to talk to Sir Arthur;—who, worse than all, evidently strove to draw his two favourites together. Determined that Mr. Wentworth should perceive how little co-operation her uncle's wishes would meet with from her, Isabel shrank on every occasion from his attempts to induce her to unite with Melicent in rendering their society agreeable to her cousin. Her harp was always unstrung,—she was too timid to ride, too much fatigued to walk,—and every opportunity was made use of by which, without attracting her uncle's attention, she could avoid giving Maximilian the slightest reason to hope that in his altered demeanour she had forgotten the dire offence which had been given by him and Lord Lymington; or that the enactor of so odious a character as that of the Inspector of

the Tin Mines could ever assume the place she had assigned to the Maximilian of her dreams.

The praise bestowed by Sir Arthur and his friends upon the females of the Compton family was but the echo of the universal opinion entertained of their merits wherever they were known. Mr. Compton, most assuredly, partook not of the popularity of his wife and daughter; but, although a harsh landlord and master, and little addicted to the hospitality of his friend Sir Arthur, he was indefatigable in his duties as a magistrate, and strict in his adherence to what was just in all transactions of business. While the first visit they paid to the guests at Danesfield, convinced the Miss Wentworths that Sir Frederick's brother-in-law was of a most positive and arbitrary disposition, they could not but immediately perceive the submission with which Mrs. Compton invariably acceded to his decisions; and the dutiful silence with which his daughter

met the unkind reproofs which, even in their presence, he could not refrain from bestowing on her. Tall and finely formed, with the symmetry of limb and feature of a Grecian statue, which her extreme fairness of complexion, little relieved by colour, caused her yet more to resemble, Alice Compton excited in Melicent and Isabel even a higher degree of admiration than previous description had prepared them to accord. Brought up in the seclusion of a country residence, in a routine of instruction, not only in all lighter accomplishments, but, as was universally known, of more solid learning, her rather distant but composed demeanour corresponded well with her singular and elevated style of loveliness; and, almost a stranger to Sir Arthur, whom she had not seen since her strictly guarded childhood, it was scarcely to be expected that her greeting should partake of the cordiality which marked that of her mother, and even, in

some degree, that of the cold and ungracious Mr. Compton.

While staying in the neighbourhood of her father's Dorsetshire residence, Colonel Lindesay had first seen and admired Miss Compton; and before long the engagement had been formed between them, which had proved so satisfactory to her connexions. The time occupied by the present visit to Sir Frederick and Lady Latimer, Colonel Lindesay was passing in Cornwall—the prolonged stay of Mr. and Mrs. Tresham at St. Austin's enabling him to fulfil at length the promise to that effect, of which various circumstances had hitherto delayed the performance.

An invitation to dine at Wentworth Court on the earliest possible day was given to the party from Danesfield; and it was with the highest encomiums on her extreme beauty and evident superiority of character, that Sir Arthur, on their return home, congratulated his nieces on their acquisition of Miss Compton's acquaintance,

and expressed his hope that they might soon enjoy the pleasure and advantage of her society for a lengthened period, and be enabled fully to appreciate her numerous good qualities.

CHAPTER VIII.

" Here is no every-day misunderstanding,
No transient pique, no cloud that passes over;
Something most luckless, most unhealable,
Has taken place."

COLERIDGE'S WALLENSTEIN.

" WERE you and Mr. Walsingham never more intimate before you went abroad than you appear to be now?" inquired Melicent of her cousin, one day when he joined Isabel and herself in the library. " My uncle seemed to think, like me, that inclination would not lead you thither, when he so strictly enjoined you not to let the morning pass without calling at Marchwood."

"Walsingham and I were never much together," replied Maximilian. "The slight difference in our age was, at that time, enough to prevent any great intimacy, especially as it was his pleasure to assume a superiority over me, which, however authorised by his steadiness of character, I was never particularly well disposed to endure. He was then, from the embarrassing circumstances wherein he found himself, unusually grave for his time of life; and, no doubt, found the society of Sir Arthur and wiser heads than mine more congenial to his disposition. His temper, too, had not been improved by his early trials, and showed itself disagreeably to a boy in whose company he felt himself under no controul. All this, of course, would be of little consequence now; yet I am mistaken if the terms we are upon are not the most likely to be permanent. With all Walsingham's recommendations, and I allow that few can boast so many, there is a degree of reserve,

and perhaps suspicion, in his character, which can scarcely accord with mine. At present we are friends in the common acceptation of the term; but I do not think it probable that we shall ever be more."

Melicent allowed that her cousin had accounted satisfactorily for the want of cordiality she had noticed between Mr. Walsingham and himself; while in his opinion of the contrast presented by their disposition she fully agreed.

"Lymington, though younger than myself, was my favourite companion when first I came home from Germany," said Maximilian, a few moments after, speaking in a more lively manner. "His improvement from our friendship, I should judge to have been more than doubtful, since he was my pupil in all the mischief and folly whereby, I believe, I made Sir Arthur often apprehend that the spirit of some German *spuk* had got possession of his heir. But you and Isabel need not fear my recurrence

to such mal-practices. *You* will not bring on a return of my old malady by your excessive mystification at a tale of diablerie, as old Ambrose would have done. I shall have no temptation to leave you with your hair resembling the quills of the fretful porcupine, instead of its own silken ringlets. With you I may amuse myself now and then with the absurdities of the good natives of Comerford, or reveal to you the wild dreams inspired by my Teutonic lore as we stand together by the stormy sea;—and Isabel will listen to me when I am most mad, most melancholy, with the sympathy which her eyes *will* express, in spite of herself, even when she is trying to be resentful."

"Nay, Max! you must remember that we are not accustomed to such flights of romance from you," replied Melicent, laughing. "Really, if one month you are to play such pranks as that of our Cornish friend, Mr. Hopkinson, and the next excite us to avocations so poetical and fan-

ciful, our heads will be in a worse condition than poor Ambrose's; and Sir Arthur will have the eccentricities of his whole family to lament over!"

"How strangely one may be misconceived!" remarked her cousin, turning towards the silent and indignant Isabel. "Here is Melicent, imagining herself called upon to stand upon the shore with her hair dishevelled, and forget that the tide is coming in, and spoil her sweet voice, moreover, by mingling it with the storm; when she, poor thing, being quite out of place in such a situation, would infallibly be drowned; or get tired of it, and walk quietly home by herself, without waiting for a proper heroic termination to the dilemma! Would not any one else see that she was intended to be wooed and won in marble palaces, and velvets and satins;—and to smile upon all, and make herself beloved by every one;—and leave us in despair at Wentworth Court, while she accompanied her noble

Earl or Marquis to his splendid castle, there again to be beloved by equals and dependants, and live in unromantic comfort and magnificence all the rest of her days? But Wentworth Court was meant for *us*—I am sure Isabel loves its dark woods and changing ocean—its rocks and foaming river—its terraces and arcades. We will seek no coronet wherewith to grace *her* gentle brow. Dearly as he loves her, I am much mistaken if Sir Arthur would be tempted by any splendid prospects of alliance to wish her to leave us. Is it not so, Melicent? Must we not keep her a willing prisoner in the home she loves so well? And do not fate and Sir Arthur, her own prophetic sensations, and the firm resolves of him who always swayed everything at Wentworth Court, and who now means not to abate one inch of authority where so desirable an end is to be attained, point out her future destiny? No refuge, no escape—vain is all blushing indignation against the fiat which,

aided by all the laws of romance, and the impulses of her own kind nature, will prevent our ancient halls from being again cheerless and desolate !"

The last words of his animated speech rang in Isabel's ear as she fled from him in indignation even surpassing that she had accorded to his former offences; while Melicent remained in the greatest amusement at the impertinence for which, with sisterly fervour, she immediately commenced lecturing the incorrigible Maximilian.

It was not from any cessation of Mr. Walsingham's visits to Wentworth Court that Melicent had been led to remark a want of intimacy between him and Mr. Wentworth;—on the contrary, few days had passed without bringing him thither; and not only the male and female gossips of Comerford, but Lady Clarence herself, soon began to suspect some deeper cause

for such frequent intercourse. The younger of the beautiful sisters was evidently the one towards whom his attentions were directed; and his mother's anxiety to ascertain the real nature of his sentiments, emboldened her to attempt gaining the confidence which she was tolerably certain would not be accorded by her son without some effort on her part.

Availing herself, therefore, of the opportunity afforded one evening, after his return from dining at Sir Arthur Wentworth's, she observed,—

"Mr. Wentworth is, I conclude, greatly improved by his travels? At all events, you, Walsingham, appear to find his society more agreeable than formerly, if I may judge by the frequency of your late visits at Wentworth Court."

Walsingham smiled, as he replied, "Wentworth Court certainly never was so agreeable to me as now; but I am surprised that you do not

ascribe to a different cause the novel attraction which, I confess, it now holds forth to me."

Disconcerted, in some measure, by the frankness with which he met her interrogations, Lady Clarence continued,

"Then there has been less exaggeration than usual in the reports to which your attentions to Isabel Wentworth have given rise? Gentle and amiable as she is, and far better calculated than her sister to promote your happiness, it is not the less certain that Mr. Wentworth's return precludes any hope of Sir Arthur's estates devolving on his nieces;—their fortunes cannot be very considerable; and you are well aware that the heavy incumbrances which press on the Marchwood property are as yet but partially removed."

"True; but my income is now sufficient, surely, to content a reasonable woman, when you were able to rest satisfied with it, while so much

more embarrassed. A few years more, and I trust to be a free man."

"Why not wait prudently, then, till that time arrives? A moment's reflection will show you how different is my situation to that of a young and thoughtless bride. You are accustomed to see me quietly and contentedly remain in seclusion; but such, I am only too certain, would not be your feelings with regard to your wife. You would not endure to see her eclipsed by women of wealthier but less distinguished families than your own. Instead of finding yourself in a few years freed from all encumbrances, each year will behold your difficulties increased by an expenditure which she will consider herself entitled to make, and which your pride will never allow you to curtail. Mortifications far greater than any we have encountered will meet you at every step. Confess that you would not for worlds reveal to your wife the necessity of strict economy for a period, and that she must resign

every superfluous luxury to which she has been all her life accustomed."

"Did I think so humiliating a disclosure necessary, madam, nothing could be farther from my thoughts than marriage. I will examine more narrowly into the state of my affairs, which I cannot but think wear a better aspect than you are willing to allow, and that you forget the alteration they have undergone."

"I do not forget—I am most truly thankful that so considerable an addition has been made to your income—that you have now sufficient to render you respectable and happy in your ancient mansion, and may look forward to seeing it reassume its cheerfulness, when presided over by one less bent down by the cares of life than myself. But that happiness must be without ostentation. Convince me that you will be satisfied with maintaining your rank in society respectably, and keeping up Marchwood as it ought to be, and Isabel Wentworth will be most

gladly welcomed by the mother, who will then willingly resign to one she already loves and esteems, the position she holds so honourable and so dear."

Mr. Walsingham retired without farther comment than thanking his mother for her affectionate anxiety for his happiness; and, whether her objections were unfounded or not, the visits of her son, as time wore on, became only more frequent at the Court; and his attentions to the beautiful Isabel yet more the subject of remark among the worthies of the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER IX.

" There were two sisters sat in a bower,
Binnorie, O Binnorie,
There came a Knight to be their wooer,
By the bonny Milldams o'Binnorie."
OLD BALLAD.

MELICENT and Isabel were awaiting one afternoon the return of Sir Arthur from his daily ride, when they heard a carriage drive up to the entrance; and, the hour being too far advanced for morning visitors, they were somewhat surprised when, after a few moments delay, Mr. Fosbrooke was ushered into the apartment. His dress was more elaborately studied then usual: his rings, his chains, were costly in the extreme, and it was in his most flowery

and graceful style, that he accosted the Miss Wentworths, and congratulated them on their return from their Cornish excursion. "Shall I be held wholly devoid of politeness and courtesy," he next proceeded, "if I inform Miss Wentworth that my visit to-day is peculiarly intended for her cousin, Mr. Wentworth, with whom I have an important negociation to enter upon?"

"You will not hesitate to tell us, Mr. Fosbrooke, if your business with my cousin is of a private nature," said Melicent, after giving directions for Maximilian's being informed of Mr. Fosbrooke's wish to see him. "Isabel, we had better leave the gentlemen in quiet possession of this room."

Their retreat was, however, earnestly opposed by Mr. Fosbrooke, on the plea that their mediation was necessary to present him to their cousin, with whom he was as yet unaccquainted. "My errand, too," he added, may, in some

respects, be more calculated to win attention from a lady's ear, and your presence will also infuse into me energy enough to plead my cause."

Max now entered, and Melicent, not a little amused at the idea of the effect their magnificent guest was likely to produce upon him, introduced Mr. Fosbrooke in due form.

The Nabob bowed extremely low as he addressed Mr. Wentworth. "Believe me, Sir, that I sincerely regret not having testified my sympathy with Sir Arthur, and my respect for yourself, by offering my congratulations to you on your return, before the occasion on which I now apply to you may give an air of selfishness to a visit which would, under other circumstances, have afforded me a satisfaction wholly unalloyed with embarrassment."

"I have received too many instances of kindness from my uncle's numerous friends, to be surprised at the obliging interest you

express, Mr. Fosbrooke," replied Maximilian ; "I am most desirous, believe me, of hearing the cause which procures me the honour of your acquaintance, and wherein you consider me able to render you assistance."

"Would that your inclination, Mr. Wentworth, did but coincide with your power ! A few words will be sufficient to open the treaty. May I hope that you will accord your permission to my offering my hand to your charming relative, the elder of the Miss Wentworths ?"

"Really, sir," replied the astonished Maximilian, "the violence of your passion appears to blind you to the fact that Miss Wentworth herself, and not her cousin, must be the person best qualified to reply to your question on such a subject."

"Pardon me, Mr. Wentworth ; I am quite aware that in your hands the arbitrement reposes ! That modest bashfulness which ever accompanies real affection would alone have

prevented my applying to the lady in such a case had not the propriety of a reference to her guardian been obvious. Being a stranger to you, Sir, and aware that your return to the neighbourhood was but of recent date, I preferred my suit in the first instance to Sir Arthur, whom I accidentally encountered on my road hither. Now, however, having been informed by him of his resignation to his future heir of the management of all affairs of this nature, and of his having delegated to him full powers and authority therein, I naturally look to Mr. Wentworth for the decision of my fate."

"Oh! that alters the case," said Max, with great solemnity,—"now, Sir, if you will take a seat, we can discuss the matter at our leisure."

"I am inclined to think, Mr. Fosbrooke, that there must be some mistake here, and that it is unnecessary to trouble Mr. Wentworth for an answer which I am surely entitled to pronounce," interposed Melicent, willing to save

her poor admirer from committing any further absurdities. Max, however, gravely rejoined,

"Excuse me, Miss Wentworth! having been nominated, as you hear, to the task, you must allow me to act according to my own judgment, even should it prove at variance with yours. The case admits of no appeal. Pray go on, Mr. Fosbrooke; or rather allow me to become the questioner in my turn. A gentleman of your discretion cannot fail to comprehend that the trust reposed in me involves serious responsibilities. May I be permitted to ask what are the pretensions whereon you ground your present demand? Remember that you must excuse my making this very necessary enquiry, as you were, before this interesting colloquy, a perfect stranger to me."

"Let me request to be allowed to answer this gentleman's obliging proposals, without putting him to any needless trouble," again Melicent entreated. Mr. Fosbrooke, however,

was not only ready, but eager with his reply to to Mr. Wentworth's interrogations. "Certainly, Sir, nothing can be more natural than that you should desire to render Miss Wentworth's future lot worthy of her manifold perfections. But though personally a stranger to you, I may be known as the possessor of Thornborough Park; a mansion now undergoing a course of improvements which will render it in time fit for so lovely an inhabitant. Your cousin will hardly find among her numerous admirers one as willing and able to gratify her slightest caprice."

"Very candid and straightforward, Sir! Thornborough Park, indeed!—I have no further objection to urge on that head."

"I am fortunate in finding a stranger like yourself, Mr. Wentworth, so favourably disposed towards me. Emboldened by your approbation, I shall venture to lift my eyes towards your beauteous relative.

"Not too fast, my dear Sir; your impatience,

which, in your situation, I own to be very excusable, hurries you on too rapidly to the conclusion pointed out by your wishes. I much fear the thing is not at all likely to prove feasible."

"Mr. Wentworth!" exclaimed the dismayed nabob, "let me entreat you to consider before you reject my offer. The decorations of my mansion are a theme for discussion for miles around you. My fortunes, ample as they are, shall be lavishly poured forth at the feet of your cousin. The jewels of the East shall sparkle on her brow; her attire be the choicest produce of its looms; her behests shall be obeyed by crowds of eager slaves; while beneath canopies of Indian silk, her tread shall fall noiselessly on the piled carpets of Persia, and her eye dwell with delight upon the costly trifles wherewith it will be my pleasure to amuse her hours of happy inactivity!"

"All this may be very well, Mr. Fosbrooke,

though I confess it sounds somewhat paradoxical to an English ear," said Maximilian, as he shook his head with a dissatisfied air, and placed himself with his back to the fire, so as to command the best view of the countenances of the sisters and of the anxious lover. "I must however plainly tell you that it does not meet my views with regard to my eldest cousin. You will, I am convinced, agree with me that a coronet could not be better placed than upon the brow of Miss Wentworth; and many advantages must be combined with wealth in the offer I should deem worthy of her acceptance. I am grieved to be compelled to give this answer, and should you ever be induced to apply to me with respect to the disposal of any other lady under my charge, the favourable impression made by your behaviour to-day shall certainly have its due weight."

"Our conference then is at an end," said Mr. Fosbrooke, rising, and looking mournfully

at Melicent, whilst his extreme near-sightedness prevented his observing that the sisters were convulsed with laughter, or possibly led him to suppose them deeply affected by the harshness of Maximilian. "I trust that you may not repent when too late, your rejection of one who would undoubtedly have secured the happiness of your relative, although he may not have attained to the high elevation demanded by your high soaring ambition. Farewell, bright vision, for ever!" And Mr. Fosbrooke rushed from the room, casting as he passed an admiring glance upon Isabel, as if expressive of regret that he should not have fixed his hopes where they might have been attended with success. Full of anger and mortification, he hurried to his carriage, scarcely deigning to notice the hospitable invitation to dinner given by Sir Arthur, whom he met in the hall, and hastily left Wentworth Court, with all its bright visions and relentless guardians, far behind.

"I hope that I have sufficiently shown my desire to remove the unfavourable impression I have been unfortunate enough to make upon Miss Isabel Wentworth," said Maximilian, as the door closed upon the discomfited suitor. "There appears to me every probability of this wealthy individual transferring to her the affections which he finds to have been vainly bestowed elsewhere; and in gratitude for my agency in the affair, I trust all past and trifling offences will be forgotten."

"If such be really your wish, you must undertake to manage the nabob's dismissal for me as properly as you have done for Melicent," said the laughing Isabel.

"Oh, pardon me, I would not for the world interfere with your arrangements. I have to apologise to your sister for my rejection of her admirer; but, were I to be as unceremonious with yours, I should infallibly give offence."

"Oh no, no!—I never will be angry with you

again—I do not think I ever could, after being so very much amused, not even if you should wear your straw hat again; only do promise, Max, to send away Mr. Fosbrooke!"

"Well, if you call me Max, instead of Mr. Wentworth, perhaps I may try what I can do for you; but my Countess elect has, I fear, not forgiven me. A word from her, and I will take measures to bring back her Eastern adorer to her feet."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Melicent; "who can tell what society he may next choose, to witness the disclosure of his passion! I am infinitely obliged by your flattering opinion of my claims to future distinction, and shall henceforth insist on your dismissing all obnoxious suitors in the same agreeable manner."

The entrance of Sir Arthur prevented Maximilian's reply; his first question was,

"What have you been doing to poor Mr Fosbrooke? I never saw a man look so much

annoyed;—and what has entertained you all so exceedingly?"

"Upon my word, sir," said his nephew, "you will really make me very unpopular, if you leave it to me to dismiss all my fair cousin's admirers, whom you may find troublesome."

"I do not understand you in the least—what can your cousins have to do with Mr. Fosbrooke? You cannot surely mean that he is a suitor for my niece?" returned Sir Arthur, in great astonishment.

"It was easy to see that there must be some mistake, when you referred him to Mr. Wentworth as your delegate on all such occasions," said Melicent; "but we are quite at a loss to know what could possibly induce any one to make himself so very ridiculous."

"Let me see," said Sir Arthur, "what did he say this morning? I hardly recollect, for whenever I go into Comerford, I am always plagued by people wanting to talk to me about

business: and to-day it was market day, and there were all the farmers with their complaints of the damage done by the gale last night, and Holloway trying to explain to me about the new sea wall, Maximilian; and really it was such a relief to be able to tell them that I had entirely resigned the management of every thing to my nephew, Mr. Wentworth!—Then, Lord Chellingham kept me for an hour talking about the rail road, and just as I had got rid of them all, and was thinking of returning home, I was overtaken by the Nabob's carriage, and he began a long unintelligible harangue about some important question, which at present engrossed his whole attention;—and so, as usual, I told him he must apply to you. He certainly did look surprised, but he got into his carriage, and drove off as fast as his four horses could take him; and I thought no more about him, till he passed me in the hall as I came in. Of course I had not the least idea what he wanted."

"I confess myself much indebted to the gentleman," said Max, "for enabling me to exercise my talents in an entirely new line, with the advantage of competent witnesses to my exemplary performance."

"I can scarcely understand the thing now," observed the perplexed Sir Arthur; "you must tell me all about the poor man's absurdities after dinner, and then, perhaps, I shall be able to remember exactly what I can have said, to give rise to so ludicrous a mistake."

CHAPTER X.

"A good growl is at any time better than a bad dinner."

PETER SIMPLE.

PRECISELY five minutes before the appointed hour, the party from Danesfield entered the drawing room at Wentworth Court, where, a quiet and social meeting having been previously stipulated for, Sir Arthur and his family received them with the single addition of Mr. Walsingham to their circle. Miss Compton's loveliness was still more remarkable than in her morning costume, arrayed as she was, in a dress of snowy whiteness; its silken folds, devoid of

the slightest ornament, fitted scrupulously to her fine figure, and her long hair parted evenly upon her fair and lofty forehead, in the strictest accordance with her regular style of beauty, and calm and collected demeanour.

"Admirably punctual!" observed Mr. Compton, on the announcement of dinner. "Upon my word, Lady Latimer, your domestics, excellent, no doubt, in other respects, ought to take pattern by those of our friend Sir Arthur in the exercise of that invaluable quality! Several times I have remarked at Danesfield a delay of considerably upwards of a quarter of an hour in sitting down to table. Where this is allowed, I consider the cook, in point of fact, the real master of the house."

"Mr. Compton insists so particularly upon the utmost punctuality at Compton Lodge," said his wife, as they took their places. "We really are the most methodical people in the world!"

"An excellent habit when once attained,"

said Sir Arthur; "but requiring time for its adoption by a household. Every thing has for so many years gone on in the same routine at Wentworth Court, that its inmates would find as much difficulty in infringing, as others in sustaining the practice."

"The precise reason, my good friend, why your house is so agreeable an one to visit," rejoined Mr. Compton. "Next in mischief to the want of punctuality in domestic arrangements, I regard the want of method in occupation. Lady Latimer, this is a subject we have frequently discussed, and I have reason to believe, that you do not perfectly agree with me in the importance of the consideration."

Her ladyship, from whatever cause, did not appear by any means desirous of a renewal of the argument; and Mrs. Compton, willing to change the conversation, observed to Miss Wentworth,

"Alice is delighted with the beauties of your

neighbourhood, which her uncle has been so kind as to take the greatest pains to show her. I am glad, on her account, that we were not induced to defer our visit to Devonshire until the winter."

"Your place is certainly well situated," observed Mr. Compton, turning to Sir Arthur; "but the country about Danesfield is very uninteresting. Sir Frederick has been good enough to take us to see all that the guide books mention as most remarkable; but I cannot say that I have as yet met with any thing to repay the being dragged up your tremendous hills, or, worse still, having to walk half the distance, out of compassion for the horses. I detest a hilly country."

"You must remember," said Sir Arthur, "that to our hills we owe the variety of scenery for which we are celebrated, and which, in our eyes, amply compensates for the inconvenience wherewith we must allow they are attended."

"When you visit us in Dorsetshire, my dear sir, you will find the difference. That is the country for driving, especially since I have done wonders with the roads. Positively, I should be scandalised at the sight of a cross road near Compton Lodge, resembling the stony and ill-kept highways of this neighbourhood."

"Mr. Compton is so careful of his horses!" said his wife; "he cannot bear to see them injured, by drawing the carriage up these steep ascents."

"Of course you have seen Plymouth and Mount Edgecumbe," said Mr. Wentworth to Miss Compton. Her father immediately rejoined,

"Yes, we went there yesterday; I begged Sir Frederick not to trouble himself, as I abhor sight-seeing. However, he was not to be persuaded, and we fatigued ourselves to death, walking over dockyards and ramparts, that every one has seen a hundred times better at Ports-

mouth. He was good enough to wish us to go over the river to Lord Mount Edgecumbe's; but as we saw it very well from the other side, there could be no occasion for being dragged about the grounds. I never enjoy those things when I have people at my elbow, continually informing me how remarkably well worth seeing they are; to any one who liked the kind of thing, Sir Frederick and Lady Latimer would be invaluable cicerones."

"Is Miss Compton a good horsewoman?" enquired Walsingham of her mother. "Much of our finest scenery is of a nature precluding the use of any sort of carriage."

"Indeed she is, Mr. Walsingham," replied Mrs. Compton. "That was too essential a point for Mr. Compton and myself to overlook, while conducting our daughter's education on a plan having for its chief object to render her happy and independent in the country life, probably destined to be hers. My idea of domestic

felicity is, entirely that of a young married couple sufficient for each other, and not looking abroad for amusement; and how can this be ensured, without an accordance of tastes and pursuits?"

"How can the pursuits of a sensible man and a foolish woman ever agree?" cried Mr. Compton, as usual interrupting his wife. "I should like to know, madam, when *we* ever had an idea in common?"—Then, willing perhaps, to efface by a change of subject the unpleasant impression evidently produced on all present, by this unprovoked rudeness, Mr. Compton turned on Max, who was endeavouring to draw his daughter into conversation. "So Mr. Wentworth!—I congratulate you on being, at last, tired of forming a member of one of the most disreputable expeditions wherein Englishmen, in the plenitude of their wisdom, ever engaged!"

This topic, not an agreeable one to Max, and

still less so to Sir Arthur, had hitherto been carefully avoided by their guests; but it offered too favourable an opportunity for the exercise of Mr. Compton's peculiar talent, to be resisted. In some embarrassment, Mr. Wentworth applied to his fair neighbour: "Let me hope for a more merciful judgment from you, Miss Compton; *you* will not, I trust, prove as severe upon the luckless adventurers as your father?"

"I am afraid," replied Alice, coldly, "that very little can be said in favour of an expedition which seems principally to have included those wholly devoid of any more useful aim or occupation."

"I will not again refer to you, Miss Compton, with the hope of a mitigation of sentence; but I must confess, you have reason on your side. I have too few arguments to adduce, in favour of my late *escapade*, to feel at all inclined to enter upon its defence."

"Let us drop the subject!" said Sir Arthur,

impatiently ; Max has quite done with his boyish follies, and I dislike to be reminded either of them, or of my own severity, which now appears to me to have been carried to an unreasonable length."

" So I should imagine," returned Mr. Compton ; " I have always considered, that not a word could be said in favour either of you, my good friend, or your nephew, both being, in my opinion, equally indefensible !"

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Lambert was found awaiting them there ; the Doctor and herself having been prevented from joining the dinner party, by his being under the necessity of attending the Bishop on his visitation. His return home, however, occurring earlier than was expected, his wife had availed herself of the circumstance, as she now informed the Miss Wentworths, to get into the carriage, and come up to them for an hour

or two. "The long and the short of the matter is this, my dear," she continued, in a confidential whisper to Melicent; "Mrs. Compton is an old school-fellow of mine, and on her account, as well as on Colonel Lindesay's, I wanted to see a little more of Alice, and find out what they have been able to make of her at last. She always was well-behaved, and never got into mischief as girls are apt to do; but then old Compton was quite enough to prevent that. It is certain, she has had pains enough taken with her, and plenty of fault-finding, there can be no doubt. Poor Lady Latimer looks quite low and out of spirits, just as I expected. I am sure I know how to feel for her; and I really must ask her presently, how she manages with Mr. Compton, and when she thinks he is going away."

"You have no idea what a comfort Alice has been to me in my troubles with her father!" said Mrs. Compton, in answer to a remark of

Lady Latimer's. "Excuse my candour, Miss Wentworth, but Mr. Compton has his peculiarities, as Lady Latimer well knows; and mine would have been but a dreary life, if my Alice had not been my sympathising friend and confidante, ever since her childhood. Indeed, I fear he is a little more passionate with her than with others, from her cause and mine having been so invariably the same in our little domestic bickerings."

Mrs. Compton paused for the sympathy she was sure to meet with from her sister-in-law, concerning her conjugal afflictions, before she proceeded,—

"Certainly, many mothers might have tired of the task, before their daughter's education was completed, had they been so constantly thwarted as I was by Mr. Compton. But his system was so entirely for the best, and suited so well with Alice's truly excellent disposition, that though we often disputed about minutiæ,

as a whole it was a subject upon which we agreed remarkably well. How thankful I ought to be, seeing what she now is, that he did not yield to my weak desire, of giving the dear girl the advantages, as I considered them, of foreign masters and continental society!—that we preferred the tranquil routine of home instruction at Compton Lodge! My influence, perhaps, kept Alice from the pedantic learning which might have rendered her excellent understanding a little unfeminine; while Mr. Compton's abhorrence of the common run of young lady acquirements, averted all danger of her valuable time being wasted in mere showy accomplishments. But for our difference of sentiment, Alice, perhaps, would scarcely have become so exactly the *juste milieu*—so thoroughly English, —so perfectly natural, and so admirably adapted to render home delightful to the man whom I must consider as fortunate as he has been judicious, in seeking and obtaining the treasure of her affections."

"But I want to hear some particulars of your first meeting with Colonel Lindesay," said Mrs. Lambert. "Unless I am mistaken, you never saw him, till after he was at Comerford in the summer."

"Indeed he was quite unknown to us, till he came down to visit an old military comrade in the neighbourhood of Compton Lodge. It really seemed to strike Mr. Compton and myself in a most extraordinary manner, considering how it has all ended, that he was the very man to suit our dear Alice. And after all, we think it was the manner in which she had been brought up, that from the first attracted him, even more than her personal advantages. He is of opinion, naturally enough, that a youth spent in country seclusion must have fitted her so admirably for the dignified retirement of her future home. One foreign grace, or the studied fascinations which so many mothers spend years in imparting to their daughters, would have entirely

marred, so far as Colonel Lindesay was concerned, the effect of what he calls her modest and dignified simplicity!"

While Mrs. Compton pursued her confidential communications at the further end of the room, Isabel's task of entertaining her companions had proved by no means an easy one. Miss Compton's reserve had apparently become too habitual to be dispelled by the temporary relief from her father's presence; and it was less difficult to succeed in drawing out her cousin Miss Latimer, a pretty shy girl of seventeen, whose timidity soon gave way before Isabel's gentle and engaging manners.

"You seem remarkably fond of novels, Miss Wentworth," somewhat suddenly observed Miss Compton, after turning over the books upon the table next her. "That is a taste which I cannot acquire. Indeed I agree with my father, in professing an utter dislike to any mere work of the imagination."

"I never can get Alice to enjoy a novel," said her mother. "For myself, I delight in them, though I would not for the world say so before Mr. Compton, who, I believe, thinks that all the mischief which ever happens in the world, arises from people reading novels; and Alice never will look into one; indeed she has no time for light reading."

"Well, I must own I like a novel of all things," said Mrs. Lambert; "and so does the Doctor, I know, at his heart; and it makes the winter evenings pass very pleasantly when I can get him to read one of Scott's aloud to me when I am at work. Do you see any harm in them, Miss Wentworth?"

"Isabel and I shall certainly side with Mrs. Compton, Dr. Lambert, and yourself," replied Melicent. "I am afraid, however, we must acknowledge that we do not possess the same exclusive taste with Miss Compton for the graver branches of study."

"I should imagine that the mind would scarcely be capable of engaging in them," said Miss Compton, "after having been engrossed by the fictitious interest of the works of modern novelists."

"I suppose Mr. Compton only approves of Richardson, and the others of that set," observed Mrs. Lambert. "I dare say they are very superior."

Miss Compton looked up from her book as if in surprise. "Oh! my dear madam, the days when young ladies were taught that it was a duty to read Clarissa Harlowe, and other books of the same stamp, are long gone by. Neither my father nor I consider the perusal of any novels as necessary to the happiness of a rational being."

A pause of some moments ensued before any one spoke again. "We have heard so much of your playing, Alice, that I am quite anxious for you presently to try Miss Wentworth's

beautiful piano-forte," at length said Mrs. Lambert, adding, as she carefully lowered her tone, "I hope Colonel Lindesay is fond of music, Alice?"

"He does not understand it at all, madam; but I believe he likes hearing it," replied Miss Compton, without thinking it necessary to alter the usual pitch of her voice. "I shall be happy to play to you this evening if you desire it."

"I wish you could give Edith a little of your sense, my dear Alice," said Lady Latimer. "Notwithstanding the excellent masters she has had, and the pains that have been taken with her, she is so shy and nervous, that she cannot sing or play a note when any one is listening to her."

"Upon my word, madam, this is an unexpected pleasure!" remarked Mr. Compton, on his entrance with the other gentlemen, address-

ing Mrs. Lambert. "And pray how is our friend the Doctor? Kept fast by the gout, I suppose;—while his careful spouse, instead of nursing him, is gadding about the country in the middle of the night, to show that to a woman any place is preferable to her home!"

While Mrs. Lambert, with imperturbable good humour, was replying to this attack, Sir Arthur said to Miss Compton, "I have not forgotten, Alice, how you used to play to me when you were last here. Now, however, I suppose I shall find you so much improved, that I shall hardly recognise my little musician."

"My daughter will give you an opportunity of judging, Sir Arthur, whether the time and pains bestowed upon this all-important feminine accomplishment have been entirely thrown away."

At a look from her father, Miss Compton rose, and suffered Sir Arthur to lead her to the

instrument. Excepting to those who might have desired more feeling to be blended with the skill she displayed, no occasion for criticism was afforded to the severest judge by her splendid performance; and unable, for once, to find fault, Mr. Compton remained, throughout the rest of the evening, in an aggravated ill humour, evincing itself in a moody silence, which, however conducive to the harmony of the present moment, held out an alarming prospect to those who would be forced eventually to endure the storm that was evidently gathering.

Almost for the first time, Max had this evening succeeded in so far mitigating Isabel's dislike, as to be unreluctantly permitted to engage her in conversation. Interested, in spite of herself, in his vivid recollections of the wild legends and poetry of Germany, and of romantic adventure in the Peninsula, she seemed to have found his enthusiasm contagious; and listened with animation almost equal to that with which

the consciousness of unwonted success was inspiring Maximilian. Not far off, meanwhile, but apart from the others, and abstractedly gazing on her countenance, stood Walsingham. Her varying colour and confused replies, made Maximilian at last aware that he no longer commanded his fair companion's undivided attention, and another glance was sufficient to reveal to him the cause of her embarrassment. The discovery was, apparently, far from satisfactory: the animation with which he had been speaking instantly vanished; and, a few moments afterwards, he had moved away from the station which he was probably convinced might be more agreeably occupied.

The colour was not lessened in Isabel's cheeks by the immediate approach of Walsingham, or by the scrutinising expression wherewith she was conscious that her cousin had regarded her as he quitted his seat by her side; but the earnestness of Walsingham's address effectually claimed

her attention;—his eloquence gradually absorbed her whole interest;—and in the deepening emotion he was able to excite, Maximilian was forgotten.

CHAPTER XII.

"He told na' her father, he told na' her mither,
He told na' ane o' her kin;
But he whispered the bonnie lassie hersel',
And did her favour win."

OLD SCOTTISH BALLAD.

A CLOUDED and cheerless morning had succeeded a tempestuous night, and the autumn wind was driving before it the faded leaves, when Isabel, a few days after our last chapter, directed her steps through the plantations, now almost stripped of their gorgeous livery, towards the lonely beach that had witnessed, several weeks previously, her encounter with the smugglers. Although the violence of the equinoctial

gale had now in some degree subsided, so as scarcely to be felt beneath the shelter of the cliffs, the sea, in the distance, was white with foam, and the waves were breaking with angry vehemence upon the shore. Why Isabel had chosen to extend her ramble so far after leaving the house only to walk in the gardens, she could scarcely have told even to herself;—it might have been that she wished to see the effect of the wild and gloomy morning upon the scene of her adventure; and its remembrance might not have been uncombined with the idea of her protector on that occasion; whatever had been the causes, it was with a start and a deep blush that, on turning from her long and steadfast gaze upon the troubled waves, she saw Mr. Walsingham by her side. He did not speak for a few moments after the first greetings were over, but remained like herself gazing upon the scene before them. Isabel felt the silence as embarrassing, and broke it by saying,

"How dark and gloomy everything looks! I have not been on this spot till now since our return from Cornwall; and was meditating, before your arrival, on the alteration wrought by so short a space of time."

"I am less struck than you, Miss Wentworth, by any change in what is around us. The clouds and the sea have, indeed, assumed another hue, but their nature is variable, and we look not to them for constancy. A gleam of sunshine will restore to the cliffs and the shore their summer aspect; and, before evening, the waves may be again rolling calmly to your feet. You stand here by my side as formerly; and, to me, the scene appears the same."

Walsingham paused for a moment before he proceeded;—

"But you, Miss Wentworth, you are not accustomed to these lonely meditations—you are graver than I ever saw you; and I have observed you, of late, silent and pre-occupied. It

is possible that the greatest alteration may, after all, have taken place in you since last we stood upon this beach together."

Isabel averted her face from her companion in considerable embarrassment, as she hesitated for a reply. "Why should you think so?" she at length answered. "I am conscious of no such gravity as that you imagine."

"Why should I think so! but because every look and action of yours is important to me;—because I have noticed this change in you since your visit to Cornwall; and it is no more than I had foreboded as the probable result of your long domestication at St. Austin's. Even now, the anxious looks I beheld you casting towards the ocean were, probably, the result of your fears for one whose arrival I heard, last night, was expected, and whom you fancied exposed to its dangers."

With a flushed but no longer averted countenance, Isabel angrily rejoined,

"I know not, Mr. Walsingham, why you should entertain such an erroneous impression of my feelings, nor what can have authorised you to express your own in this manner. Lord Lymington, to whom I must suppose you allude, occupied no portion of my thoughts when you found me here, though I now reproach myself for not having at least entered into the solicitude his sister may be experiencing for his safety."

"Do not turn so angrily from me! You say that I am unauthorised to speak thus. True;—but you do not know the feelings which prompt my words, or you would be generous enough to calm the anxiety that has led me to offend you. Will you not tell me, Isabel, that the man I fear has had no share in the thoughtfulness which has lately marked your demeanour?"

Isabel blushed deeply beneath the earnest gaze of Walsingham, as, almost angry with herself for yielding to his entreaties, she gave

him the assurance he required, and turned to retrace her path homewards. Her companion, however, kept close by her side.

" You have been generous, Miss Wentworth, in lightening my breast of some part of the weight of dread and uncertainty that has lately hung about me. You will not now, let me hope, refuse the hearing which I left Marchwood this morning resolved, if possible, to obtain. I could almost wish that my mind were of a more superstitious cast, so as to accept for a favourable augury, after my walk by the dark waters' side, the unlooked-for pleasure of finding you here alone, and unpreoccupied, you assure me, by the idea of another. Befriended thus, can I help throwing aside the doubts, the struggles that have hitherto beset me; and seeking at once to learn whether I can hope that my love may in time awaken a corresponding feeling on your part;—whether you may be won from your present enviable home, from the friends, the bless-

ings which surround you, to form the happiness of one who can but return by his deep and passionate attachment the sacrifice he asks you to make for him; and whose sense of what you would thus relinquish almost destroys the felicity your answer might confer."

Incapable of any reply, Isabel trembled so violently, that Walsingham drew her arm within his to afford her support. With her eyes rivetted to the ground, and in a scarcely audible voice, she at length said,

"There are few women who would regret being able, by some slight sacrifice, to prove that they were not ungrateful for a similar affection."

"May I hope that I do not misunderstand you, dearest Isabel?" exclaimed Walsingham, as his countenance suddenly brightened, and he looked down with pride and tenderness upon the agitated girl. "Are you that generous trusting woman who will deem all privations of

state and luxury repaid by affection? Remember that one word makes you irrevocably mine—no power on earth, that word once spoken, should tear you from me! Think of all you resign, of the poor reward I can offer, and then tell me, Isabel,—do you love me?"

Walsingham waited in profound emotion; and although no other listener could have caught the low, indistinct answer of his companion, it was amply sufficient to dispel all gloom from his brow, and to relieve his mind, for the present, from every care. As he continued to support her slow and faltering steps, his new sensations of confident happiness imparted to his features a frank and exulting expression seldom to be traced there; and when, yielding to Isabel's earnest desire, he allowed her to return home, it was his firm determination that no care or uneasiness from which he could shield her, should ever come near one who had thus met his love, thus trusted within his hands her destiny.

On entering the house, Isabel's intention of escaping unnoticed to her own apartment was frustrated by Ambrose, who, meeting her in the hall, told her that Miss Wentworth had already made several inquiries after her, and was quite uneasy at her long absence. Isabel hastened to the saloon, where, to her surprise, she found awaiting her, not only her sister and Maximilian, but Lord Lymington, who had arrived a few minutes before. Confused by the wondering interrogatories with which she was received, as to what could have detained her out so long on so disagreeable a day, Isabel looked to Walsingham for assistance; but his countenance was again dark and gloomy, and Lord Lymington's arrival seemed most assuredly to occasion him anything rather than pleasure. A painful emotion rose within Isabel's heart—was this a moment for jealousy? She felt that, for the first time in her life, she was distrusted by one who ought to have known her better, and turned away, grieved

and dejected at her lover's strange and altered demeanour.

Lord Lymington, in the highest possible spirits, was giving an animated description of the various disasters of his voyage, all of which he considered only as enhancements of the gratification of finding himself in his present situation. "Besides my desire of acquainting myself with the effect of recent discoveries and transformations," said he, turning to Melicent, "and the interest I naturally felt in the progress of our little romance; besides all this, it was impossible for me to remain any longer where I was;—I was actually driven away from St. Austin's. Tresham and Laura! Oh, Miss Wentworth, you can have no idea of what I had to undergo during the latter part of my stay!—The storms I have encountered at sea were far preferable to the halcyon calm I left behind. I was in about as deplorable a predicament as the sister or friend of a bride during the wedding

occasion; and when, on returning from dining in the neighbourhood,—Tresham having refused to accompany me because his wife was unwell, —when, on coming home, I found him reading to Laura! there was nothing left but to make up my mind at once, and leave the Abbey on the earliest possible day!"

"And you are fortunate, Lymington, in the time you have chosen for your visit," said Max. "I really believe you must have had some intimation that we were all going to a ball at Oaklands to-night."

"Indeed! then the Falcon is doubly to be thanked for bringing me here so rapidly. I might have divined that your return would be the signal for one of Mrs. Severn's *fêtes*. I hope I am not too late in my application to you," he continued, approaching Isabel, who was seated a little apart from the others, and hardly listening to their conversation. "Since I have come so far, you will not refuse to dance the

first dance with me this evening? I have a thousand things to tell you, and yet more to ask," he added, looking laughingly at Max.

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied Isabel, starting from her reverie; while, as she raised her eyes, and caught Walsingham's reproachful glance, she longed to recal what she had said.

"Is Sir Arthur likely to be at home soon?" inquired Walsingham, abruptly addressing Miss Wentworth; and hearing that he was not expected to return till dinner time, he took his leave; and Isabel, unable to conceal her dejection of spirits, soon retired to her own room, to endeavour to regain her composure in solitude. Unwilling to make her sister a participator in her uneasiness, she determined to say nothing to her of what had occurred until the morrow, especially as she feared that her communication would give little pleasure to Melicent, with whom she well knew Mr. Walsingham to be no favourite. She could not disguise from herself

the trials and anxiety her lover's disposition seemed likely to prepare for her: already she found she had offended him by her incautious acceptance of Lord Lymington's proposal. Although little disposed to join in the amusement expected by the others from the Oaklands *fête*, she could not venture to disappoint her uncle and her friends by refusing to accompany them. A few hours restored to her the power of dissembling her feelings, and the emotion she had undergone was only to be traced in the fresh interest it had imparted to her beauty, the colour mantling her cheek, and the increased softness of her low and touching voice.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Madam, the guests are come, supper served up, you called, my young lady asked for, the nurse cursed in the pantry, and every thing in extremity."

ROMEO AND JULIET.

"Now pray do not apologize for Mr. Compton!" said Mrs. Severn, in her sweetest of tones, interrupting Mrs. Compton's ingeniously framed excuses for the absence of her husband, who had remained behind at Danesfield, in one of his very worst humours. "He only serves me as Mr. Severn has done, in fancying himself affected by this relaxing weather, and preferring his peaceful arm chair, and quiet book and

newspaper, to affording me his kind assistance at my little *réunion*. So sensible and right in both to stay where they knew they would be most comfortable!"

"Well! I am sure every thing turns out fortunately for Mrs. Severn to night," remarked Mrs. Lambert to Lord Lymington, after a friendly greeting to the party from Wentworth Court. Old Compton is too sulky to come, so we may all be as merry as we like; and there are Sir Frederick and Lady Latimer looking as if they could dance for joy, and Miss Compton as beautiful as an angel. How that has been brought about, passes my comprehension, for she certainly was originally as plain a child as I ever saw; I wish, for your brother's sake, she had a little more life in her, but really, with such a father to plague her, her want of spirits cannot be wondered at."

"There is nothing to be said against Lindesay's choice on the score of beauty, it must be

allowed," replied Lymington, looking with admiration at Alice, whose appearance at that moment certainly justified Mrs. Lambert's panegyric, as standing beside her mother, her classic contour, and the simple elegance of her costume, appeared in the strongest possible contrast with the studied affectation and showy toilettes of Mrs. Severn and her daughters.

A quadrille being now formed, Lord Lymington led his reluctant partner to the set, while Walsingham, who had not attempted to join her, remained looking at the dancers with haughty indifference.

"Did I not tell you," said Lymington, "that you would be pleased with Hopkinson when you knew him better; and are you not, by this time, the best friends imaginable?"

"It is fortunate for you," replied Isabel, that you did not arrive during my first fit of rage, at having been so ridiculed by you both. Whatever my cousin's own merits may have effected

in his favour, you have yet to obtain forgiveness."

"You cannot be unmerciful to-day, when I have braved the stormy seas to come and solicit pardon; besides, I was never, I think, in such high spirits in my life before—every thing seems *couleur de rose*, and you must not by your unkindness darken all my prospects."

"Were it only for the sake of effect, how can you expect so romantic a damsel as myself to lose the opportunity for cherishing a deep-rooted resentment?"

"I really believe you *do* study effect," returned Lymington; "nothing in that way could be better contrived, than your appearance this morning, with the knight of whose valorous deeds I had heard so much;—more especially, as you were imprudent enough to own you had chosen the beach for your interesting promenade. I am afraid, however, that you must have been very unkind to your poor hero, for he looks extremely savage!"

Isabel's colour rose, but Walsingham's jealous anger appeared to her so wholly causeless, that she was resolved to leave him to recover from it at his leisure, and turning again to Lord Lymington, she said,

"You have as yet scarcely told me any thing of your sister, or of St. Austin's; Melicent and I are most anxious to hear more of the change which you say has taken place there?"

"Were you there now, Miss Wentworth, you would understand why I said that I had never before felt so entirely free from care. To your admirable sister's influence, I principally ascribe the alteration which has taken place in Laura and her husband. I may impart to you without fear of ridicule, the joy I feel at seeing Tresham and his wife at length seeking happiness in each other's society, and mutually engaged in rendering their home all that it ought to be. You would scarcely know Laura again—she is so much prettier, and more animated, and

yet her manner is still as soft and gentle as ever."

Isabel expressed her sympathy with his joy, and they continued talking over the different events that had occurred at St. Austin's, until the dance being concluded, they were joined by Max, who immediately claimed Isabel's hand for the next set. They were now close to where Walsingham was standing, and Isabel unhesitatingly declined her cousin's request. On Lymington's enquiring with whom she was going to dance, Walsingham instantly advanced. "Miss Isabel Wentworth is engaged to me,"—he said, as he drew her triumphantly away from the disappointed friends.

"What is the meaning of all this, Max? I trust she does not really like that man!" said Lymington, with an enquiring glance at his companion. Mr. Wentworth, however, moved on without replying, and Lymington, after a few moments, seeking Sir Arthur, requested that he

would present him to Mrs. and Miss Compton. Their approach was not unperceived by the former, who immediately reported it to her daughter, adding a maternal admonition respecting the propriety of her being more than usually agreeable and friendly with Colonel Lindesay's brother, wherein the coldness of Alice's salutation showed her by no means disposed to acquiesce.

"Colonel Lindesay's last letter tells us, that we must not hope to see him for some time," said Mrs. Compton, after the first ceremonies of introduction were over, and she had duly expressed her pleasure at the rencontre. "Was his presence in town just now so very indispensable?—I know that Mr. Compton thinks punctuality and decision in matters of business, one of your brother's most praiseworthy characteristics; but I, Lord Lymington, am weak enough to regret the weariness from which no judicious reasoning will rescue some of the in-

mates of Compton Lodge, during the period of his detention from us."

With some fear lest this allusion might have annoyed and embarrassed Miss Compton, Lymington asked her to dance. She accepted his arm without speaking, and as they took their station, he looked with admiration at his beautiful partner, and wondered at the unusual difficulty he found, in breaking the silence which subsisted between them. Yet there was something so calm, and perhaps indifferent, in the expression of Alice's countenance, that every moment increased his perplexity, in choosing a topic likely to interest her; and when, by a desperate effort, he broke the spell, it was by the very observation he least intended to make. "Good heavens!" he mentally exclaimed, as soon as the words had escaped his lips, "what could induce me to ask such a girl as this if she was fond of dancing?"

"It is too harmless an amusement for me

to disapprove of," replied Alice. "Warmer praise you will scarcely require me to bestow on a pursuit so frivolous."

"I intended my enquiry to refer to the style of visiting in your neighbourhood," said Lymington, confusedly, "rather than to your peculiar tastes; but I imagine they are somewhat at variance with any scenes of this description?"

"Oh no!" said Alice. "It is very desirable for every one to unbend occasionally; though I own, I should be sorry to appear to take so lively an interest in such pursuits, as to give the idea of being unable to enjoy more refined and tranquil pleasures."

"Of course," said Lymington, following the direction of her eye, which perhaps unconsciously rested upon Melicent's animated countenance. "Miss Wentworth looks beautiful, does she not?—and she may be taken as an

example of one who can enjoy both society and retirement to an enviable degree."

"Certainly it is an enviable faculty," replied Alice, "if, which I doubt, any one *can* unite tastes so opposite. I confess *I* could not display such keen delight in listening to the vapid nonsense by which we are expected to be amused on occasions like the present."

"You are severe, Miss Compton!" answered Lymington, slightly colouring; "but I will not quarrel with you for your preference of seclusion, as I quite agree with you as to the delights of a country life."

"By a country life, most gentlemen, I believe, mean a life spent in hunting and shooting," observed Alice. "My ideas of happiness include rational associates, possessing intellects sufficiently refined to appreciate taste and cultivation of mind;—but it is one of the advantages of the judicious education I have received, that

it renders one independent of those external resources I can scarcely expect to meet with."

"You will not find the society very numerous, but I do not think it so wholly unrefined in Argyleshire," said Lymington, hastily; then, fearful of having offended her by his thoughtless allusion to her future destiny, he added,

"I beg your pardon—you were probably referring to the society in Dorsetshire?"

"No, I was not," said Alice. "That is not of much consequence to me now; but, of course, I should like to know what sort of place Strathmorven is likely to be, for Colonel Lindesay is, really, too enthusiastic on that topic for one to form a just opinion."

"I am afraid it is one on which you will have equal fault to find with me. There is no place equal to Strathmorven in my opinion."

"I am glad to hear it," remarked Miss Compton: "for though I fear our tastes would not

exactly accord in choosing a residence, it is, at least, satisfactory to hear praise of a spot, where one is to live away from one's own connexions, and, probably, without a single person near with the slightest congeniality of mind or disposition."

"Thank Heaven that dance is over!" said Lymington to himself, after conducting Miss Compton to her mother. "I hope Lindesay finds her more agreeable, but I do not feel inclined to quarrel with him for his very superior lady-love!"

"This is the first opportunity I have had, Lord Lymington, of offering to you my sincere congratulations, on the happy event about to take place in your family," said Mrs. Severn, approaching him as with unusual gravity he stood contemplating the dancers. "Ah! I see where your attention is fixed; your interest in Miss Compton is so natural!—I am quite delighted that our little impromptu affair of this evening

has been the means of introducing you to each other."

Though conscious of a totally different subject for meditation, Lymington was little disposed to undeceive Mrs. Severn, and allowed her to proceed without interruption.

"Colonel Lindesay has succeeded so well in his search after perfection, that I no longer feel inclined to condemn him for being a little overfastidious. You will be surprised to hear we had once quite a *demèlé* in consequence of his too critical estimation of the merits of the fascinating Miss Wentworth."

"You must be mistaken," replied Lymington, his attention immediately attracted to what Mrs. Severn was saying. "Malice itself would find some difficulty in attacking Miss Wentworth."

"Exactly what I interposed when your wicked brother accused her of being such a terrible coquette! First impressions are

everything, and unfortunately she appeared in that light to him on the night of his presentation to her in the Comerford ball-room. Mr. Walsingham and he made quite *cause commune* in their shameful attack upon my beautiful young friend."

"They must have been under a most extraordinary delusion when they mistook for coquetry the animation of Miss Wentworth's truly delightful manners," said Lymington, warmly, as his eye glanced to the spot where Melicent, in all her sparkling loveliness, was standing near the statue-like Alice.

"I am afraid we must confess she had been flirting a little with Mr. Tresham!" pursued Mrs. Severn. "And why should she not? How could she imagine a judge could be found severe enough to find fault with the innocent pleasure of gratifying such very pardonable, and as I fear you will call it, such feminine vanity?"

"Miss Wentworth is so unlike the lady he has chosen, that we cannot wonder at Lindesay's not being sufficiently alive to her merits; but I am convinced that a few days must have made him retract his opinion," said Lymington.

"How much you must congratulate yourself, then, on the chance that removed him from temptations which your sex could never resist, although you like to blame us for the little arts and fascinations always accompanying finished and conscious elegance! His union with that charming Miss Compton must be so satisfactory to Mrs. Tresham and yourself! My girls are perfectly enchanted with her style, so new and attractive, even in its slight rusticity. Louisa has been trying in vain to keep herself disengaged for the purpose of imparting to you the interest she takes in your charming sister-in-law, as I may almost permit myself to call her."

"Remember;" said Sir Arthur, when taking leave of Mrs. Compton, whose departure from Danesfield was fixed for the next day,—"that you are engaged to spend your Christmas at Wentworth Court, when I hope to prevail on Mr. and Mrs. Tresham, as well as Colonel Lindesay, to give you the meeting. Mr. Compton has promised also to bring my little friend Dora to pass her holidays with us. I trust you do not object, Mrs. Compton?"

"Upon my word, I hardly know what to say, Sir Arthur. Dora is much too young to be admitted into society; I really think she will be much better left at Compton Lodge. Her spirits are naturally excessively high, and Mr. Compton indulges her so much that I can by no means boast of possessing great controul over my little fairy!"

"You would not think, surely, of leaving the poor thing by herself at Christmas?—No, no,

she must come to us! I shall not allow Mr. Compton to retract his promise of bringing her, I assure you."

"Mr. Compton will scarcely fail in an engagement which will afford so much enjoyment to his favourite. It was with the greatest reluctance that he was induced to send her to school at all, and, indeed, I am myself no advocate for that mode of education for girls, unless under very peculiar circumstances. For worlds I would not have sent Alice from under my own eye; but it was beginning to be highly desirable that Dora should acquire habits of regular application; and really, had she remained at home, her originally fine disposition appeared likely to be entirely ruined by her father's pernicious indulgence."

"Well, well, recollect that I shall expect you all; and now, good night, and farewell till Christmas! Sir Frederick's carriage is waiting,

I hear, as well as mine, and this is a late hour for me to be from home. Our friend Severn and your good husband have, doubtless, been fast asleep these three hours."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Les contretems qui troublent les familles
Viennent toujours par la faute des filles."
L'ENFANT PRODIGUE.

THE moment of waking, on the following morning, came fraught to Isabel with the consciousness that she could no longer defer the communication of her engagement. Walsingham had acquainted her with his intention of calling upon Sir Arthur at an early hour ; and in nervous expectation of the result of their interview, she found herself, after breakfast, established as usual in the room devoted to the morning avocations of the sisters. The anxiety

she experienced was, however, no more than the inevitable accompaniment of a similar predicament to a young and timid girl. Her uncle's regard for Mr. Walsingham removed any apprehension of his serious disapprobation ; she knew Melicent to be too reasonable not to dismiss the prejudices which she would soon be forced to admit as groundless ; and, in the course of the preceding evening, Walsingham had fully succeeded in dispelling the slight umbrage occasioned to his fair mistress by his transient waywardness of manner. Her earnest longing that her cousin and Lord Lymington would betake themselves to some out-of-doors employment, seemed, for the present, unlikely to be gratified. Max and his friend were too full of their last evening's amusement to have half finished the laughing remarks and details which they poured in upon Melicent and herself, as they sat, the one drawing, the other at her embroidery frame, while their companions

fortunately talked too fast to notice the trepidation of Isabel, as she alone distinguished the sound of distant footsteps passing across the hall to her uncle's library, and divined to a certainty the exact moment of her lover's arrival. The courage to rise from her seat was all that was wanting to induce her to make her escape from a situation which was every instant becoming more intolerable.

"Maria Severn used to be rather a pretty girl," observed Maximilian, carelessly. "I wish she had not grown so stupid."

"Unfeeling monster!" exclaimed Lord Lymington. "Is this the effect produced by Mrs. Severn's touching description of her poor Maria's delicate state of health. 'Quite a different girl before you, Mr. Wentworth, left England!'—Rather pretty!—was that your opinion when the fair invalid so expressively faltered, 'Ah, Mr. Wentworth, we have had nothing so pleasant since you went away, as

our duets by moonlight, on the terrace at Wentworth Court!'"

"Nonsense, Lymington; you know that you were not half grateful enough to Mrs. Severn for her assurances that you had always been such a very great favourite of hers, because you did not talk nonsense to her daughters—she always had so high an opinion of young men who were never in attendance upon her girls!"

"Mrs. Severn seems occasionally to make it a point of conscience to neutralise the effect of her own flatteries," observed Melicent. "Last night, after trying my patience by the most elaborate compliments, she selected as a subject for conversation, the extreme folly of some unfortunate friend, who actually always believed the nonsense she talked to her; 'which, my dear Miss Wentworth, is the kind of thing absolutely necessary in the world, especially among those who mingle in foreign society.'"

While Melicent was speaking, the door slowly opened, and Sir Arthur made his appearance. His presence was not accustomed to act as a check upon the vivacity of his young relations; and none, excepting the conscious Isabel, remarked the unusual gravity of his countenance. He took a seat, and remained for a short time looking kindly, but sorrowfully upon his beautiful favourite, who bent her head still lower over the work she was spoiling, to endeavour to conceal the confusion depicted in her features. "Melicent," he said, at length, "come with me to the library; I have something to say to you." Struck with his tone, Miss Wentworth immediately rose and followed him from the room, where her hapless sister was left to sustain a conversation with Mr. Wentworth and his friend.

"Can Mr. Fosbrooke meditate a fresh attack upon your sister's heart?" enquired Maximilian, laughing. "There really was something ominous in my good uncle's manner."

"Did you think so?" replied Isabel, without raising her eyes. "Perhaps my uncle wants Melicent to copy some letters for him."

"What an unpoetical idea! exclaimed Lymington. "You really have fallen off most lamentably since leaving St. Austin's. I fear you must have suffered from a complete dearth of interesting adventures lately, and met with no society of a more imaginative cast than that of the matter-of-fact Miss Compton."

"Indeed I am heartily tired of adventures, and will never wish for anything romantic again as long as I live?"

"Heaven be thanked! you give me new life by thus pronouncing the sentence of dismissal against your valorous knight of the woeful countenance, of whom, to tell the truth, Max and myself were beginning to be plaguily jealous! I never look at him without thinking of the Master of Ravenswood, or some to her personage equally disagreeable."

The summons which now arrived for Isabel herself to join the conference in the library, was, at that moment, so inexpressible a relief that it lessened, in some measure, the terror which would otherwise have attended her entrance of the apartment where she was awaited by her uncle and sister. To Melicent, especially, the tidings she had received were indeed an unwelcome surprise, since, although not wholly a stranger to Isabel's feelings towards Walsingham, she had yet by no means expected her young sister to have so quickly determined her own fate. Such sensations, however, were now to be concealed in the endeavour to soothe and tranquillise Isabel, whose attempt at composure at length utterly failed her, as she listened to the fatherly address by which Sir Arthur signified his consent to the measure she considered most likely to promote her own happiness, however militating, as he could not

but feel, against the wishes he had too confidently nourished.

"I have no reason to blame your election, my dearest niece," he said; "its object I have known from boyhood, and he possesses my high esteem and regard. You are still so young, indeed, that I had hoped to retain you longer under my care,—nay, why should I disguise it, I once hoped that you, my Isabel, would never have left me; and that your marriage forming a double connexion between us, my last days would have been spent with you by my side. But I have no right to influence your heart, nor could its choice, I believe, have more worthily fallen. The sight of your felicity, my beloved child, will speedily reconcile me to the failure of my own wishes. Your lover is generous," he continued with a smile, taking Isabel's hand; —"it shall be my care, nevertheless, that he does not receive this little hand unaccompanied by a dowry worthy of my adopted daughter. Some time must elapse, however, before, in

prudence, Walsingham can marry, and I have the more earnestly insisted upon this point, from the circumstance of your extreme youth affording another plea to second our reluctance to lose you."

With not less kindness apparent in word and manner, Sir Arthur, at a later period of the day, presented Walsingham to his niece, as the man who having avowedly gained her affection, was now to be looked upon as her future husband. Walsingham, with equal fervour and sincerity, pledged himself to secure her happiness to the uttermost of his power. He brought her an affectionate note from Lady Clarence, who was at present prevented from leaving home by indisposition, but who entreated Isabel not to delay visiting her to receive her thanks for the happiness she had conferred upon her son. Thus encouraged, Isabel found her spirits again rise sufficiently to enable her to join the family party, and to endure without

overwhelming embarrassment, the examining glances which Lymington, whose suspicions that something was amiss had at length gained the right channel, was directing towards her and Walsingham. In spite, however, of her utmost endeavours, and of the evident attempts made by some of the others to dissipate the prevailing restraint, the evening wore heavily away. Her uncle remained grave beyond his wont—Melicent looked restless and anxious,—Max held a book in his hand, but she did not think he was reading,—and every word that passed between herself and Walsingham continued to be watched by Lymington, with an air that savoured more of disapproval of her taste than of the disappointed lover. As she looked at the serious faces, and listened to the forced and uninteresting remarks of those around her, Isabel thought with a sinking heart of the probable length of her engagement, and she experienced a positive relief when Walsingham's departure permitted her to withdraw to her own

room, there to reflect upon her future prospects, and to hope that she was not destined to go through many more days marked by the same uncomfortable sensations which had distinguished this, the first of her acknowledged betrothment.

"What can have induced Isabel to accept that man?" said Max, placing himself beside Melicent's work-table, after Isabel had retired, and while Lord Lymington was good-naturedly losing numerous games at piquet to Sir Arthur.

"I suppose because she likes him," quietly replied Melicent, who was plying her needle with unwonted diligence. "Any girl, surely, might love one so agreeable and so universally respected as Mr. Walsingham."

"But she must see that he is not a man to make her happy. My uncle, if I mistake not, is as little pleased with the match as we are—yes, *we;* for although you vindicate Isabel's choice, it is impossible for you to hide from me that our feelings agree upon the present occa-

sion. We are not strangers, Melicent—we are allied by blood as well as by affection:—the welfare of Isabel is dear to me as well as you:—tell me then, candidly, that you doubt her having secured it by the step she has taken."

It was in a low and hurried voice that Melicent replied, "Why should you urge me to express a feeling of prejudice which I myself condemn, and am most desirous to overcome? It is true that, at the present moment, I am little disposed to look forward cheerfully to Isabel's becoming the wife of Mr. Walsingham; but any separation between us must, in the first idea, occasion anguish; and it would doubly grieve me to hear my own possibly erroneous impression confirmed by you, who have had more opportunities of judging his character correctly."

"I see that you do not mistake me. Walsingham is a man of worth and honour; and, as as you say, there is no reason why many a

woman should not be happy to bear his name. Isabel, however, is not such a woman;—open, candid, high-souled as she is, he is unworthy of her. He will torment her by his captious temper—by his unreasonable jealousy. Even now, when he ought to be the happiest man in the world, every look of the woman who has assured him of her affection, is watched; and, if she is not constantly occupied with himself, he is moody and discontented. She had far better have chosen Lymington; who, I believe, only waited for encouragement. He is a fine, open-hearted fellow, though still not quite attaining to what I think Isabel's husband ought to be."

"Lord Lymington, with all his good qualities, is, perhaps, a little too thoughtless, too inconsiderate, to please one so enthusiastic as my sister."

"I wish we had completely cured her of romance, for it must be that which has made her

fall in love with the lord of Marchwood. Poor Isabel! the very idea of her living in that forlorn and melancholy place, with such a personage as her future spouse, is enough to chill one's blood. But the game is over, and our conversation must also end; though, by the way, I fear Isabel would say that playing at piquet was a sadly unsentimental employment for a disconsolate lover."

CHAPTER XV.

" Ja, Mutter, segne deinen Sohn!—Diess Herz
Es hat gewählt ; gefunden hab' ich sie,
Die mir durch's Leben soll Gefährtinn seyn."
SCHILLER.

A MORE unfortunate *contretemps* could hardly have occurred than that which caused Mrs. Lambert, accompanied by Miss Jennings, to pay one of her unfrequent visits to Marchwood, on the very day when Isabel was to undergo her first presentation to Lady Clarence, in the new character conferred upon her by her engagement to her son.

With many expressions of delight at the opportune encounter, Mrs. Lambert, who, when Sir Arthur and his nieces arrived, had been on the point of departure, now rescinded her intention, and ordered her carriage to be put up, declaring that she could not make up her mind to leave such agreeable company. "One does not often see so gay a party in this room," she observed confidentially, as she seated herself next Isabel, and looked complacently round the somewhat formal circle; "and staying luncheon is what I make a point of never doing at Marchwood, where we know everything does not go on quite the same as at Wentworth Court or the Parsonage. You don't know, my dear, the difference made by people dropping in unexpectedly, when servants are kept on board wages. But this morning it was plain somebody was expected to stop, for I looked into the dining-room as I came through the hall, and the sight of the ham and the venison pasty

there has made my mind quite easy about it to-day."

"Why does your pretty friend Miss Jennings look so grave?" inquired Sir Arthur of Mrs. Lambert, while his eye followed Miss Euphemia to the distant window to which she had retreated. "I was apprehensive something was the matter, from her refusing to dance the other night."

"Oh! that was because she is going to be married, and therefore does not think it right to dance. Great absurdity that, in my opinion, generally speaking; but as she takes a man three times as old as herself, perhaps it is as well that she should not be inclined to skip about too much. I assure you I had some difficulty in persuading her there would be no harm in taking a drive with me to-day, when the Nabob is gone up to town."

"Is Mr. Fosbrooke then the happy man? I

was not aware such a marriage was in contemplation."

"I wonder you have not heard of it, for Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer are so delighted with the match that they can talk of nothing else. It certainly is a capital thing for Euphemia in point of money; and as it seems, from what she says, she is so much attached to him, it is all as it ought to be, though I must say, I wonder at her taste. The wedding will be almost immediately, as soon as they have got finery and trinkets enough together; and Mr. Fosbrooke is gone up to town to hurry the lawyers. That's the reason why she thinks it right to look out of spirits to-day."

While Mrs. Lambert's unceasing loquacity prevented her from being an acute observer of all that was going forward, it might also have the useful effect of tending, in some degree, to conceal Lady Clarence's evident dejection from the observation of her guests. Painfully soli-

citous as she was for her son's welfare, she might excusably doubt the possibility of any future connexion securing for him a companion as devoted to his wishes, and with tastes and habits so entirely in accordance with his own, as hers had ever been; nor was it to be wondered at if, even whilst she looked at the beautiful and ingenuous countenance, in whose sweetness of expression a less anxious mother would have read an earnest of her son's future happiness, Lady Clarence should doubt whether one so lovely, and hitherto so free from care as Isabel, would contentedly submit to the privations of the home wherein she was eventually to succeed her. Involuntarily, a deeper sadness overspread her features; and when Walsingham impatiently strove to withdraw Isabel from her present position, by proposing to show her a part of the grounds which she had not yet seen, she could not refrain from remarking, with some asperity:

"Walsingham expects every one to feel the same interest with ourselves in all that is connected with Marchwood. He forgets that custom and long residence alone can attach one to a forlorn old place like this."

"Miss Isabel will get terribly wet if you take her across the long grass in those thin shoes, to say nothing of the drippings from the trees," interposed Mrs. Lambert; "and, if she takes my advice, she will put off her walk till she can take a turn on the nice dry gravel at Wentworth Court."

"Melicent and Isabel have never seen the view from the top of this house," said Sir Arthur, whom Mrs. Lambert's report had alarmed as to the state of the grounds. "That will be a more practicable expedition for such a day as this; and it will, I think, more than repay them for their trouble."

Sir Arthur's proposition so entirely met with Mrs. Lambert's approbation, that she insisted

upon accompanying his nieces; and accordingly they proceeded, under Walsingham's guidance, towards the upper part of the mansion.

"I wanted to see whether things were in better order here than they used to be, since I recommended a new housemaid to Lady Clarence," said Mrs. Lambert, while waiting in one of the uninhabited apartments for Walsingham's rejoining them with the key of the one they were next to pass through; "but good servants are spoiled if they have no one to look after them; and I fancy as long as she has just her own part of the house attended to, my lady's not very particular about the rest. It's not often, you know, that the spare rooms are wanted for visitors here!—Oh, my dear!" she continued, addressing Melicent, "I am so thankful that I was wrong about your ever having anything to do with this place! Any girl will have enough to put up with from her stately ladyship, who cares for nothing but her son, and

has succeeded in spoiling him most completely; but your tolerating their odd ways, after what you have been accustomed to, would have been quite out of the question, and, in my opinion, absolute insanity!"

Each open door and neglected apartment afforded fresh scope, during their progress, for Mrs. Lambert's confidential animadversions; whilst her curiosity often detained her behind the others, in order that by investigating the secrets of various cupboards and recesses, she might obtain fresh evidence of the negligence of Lady Clarence's superintendence, and the inefficiency of her domestics.

"Well, this does look comfortable!" she exclaimed, upon entering the dining-room, where the rest of the party were waiting their return. "Upon my word, Lady Clarence, Marchwood is just intended for you and Mr. Walsingham; and it is very fortunate he is not as foolish as most young men, and knows when he is comfortable.

It would be an undertaking, indeed, to furnish those rooms for a young Mrs. Walsingham; and yet this part of the house is so nice and compact, and so exactly what you want, that I do not see how you could otherwise find room for her."

"I trust my son's wife will be able to content herself with the accommodation, imperfect as I confess it to be, which has hitherto sufficed for my comfort and happiness," replied Lady Clarence, gravely. "It has been my duty to look forward to so probable an event as his marriage; and I am too well aware of the many inconveniences to which she will have to submit, to increase them by my presence. When my son brings his bride to supply my place at Marchwood, I shall contentedly seek a home elsewhere."

"Then I am sure we all hope that he will not think of doing anything so silly," eagerly rejoined Mrs. Lambert. "It will be long

enough before he finds any one to do what you have done for him, Lady Clarence. I declare I have made you quite grave by my nonsense; and so, if you please, we will call another subject. Euphemia, my dear, cannot we find something amusing to tell Lady Clarence about our pleasant day at Thornborough?"

The young lady thus appealed to hesitated for a moment for a suitable reply; but as none presented itself, she merely looked a little more demure than usual, and Mrs. Lambert proceeded:—

"I am sure I never expected anything of the sort; but, when we drove over with Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer, at Mr. Fosbrooke's request, to see his improvements, there was the most magnificent collation!—I must not say in whose honour, I suppose, Euphemia? Every delicacy of the season he had got together—pines, and melons, and ices, and champagne, besides all sorts of Eastern dainties. Then as for the house

itself, no want of furniture there!—from the top to the bottom (and I assure you there was not a corner I left unexplored) everything showed what we know to be the case, that money is no object with the Nabob, compared with the comfort or fancies of the lady he means to instal there."

Miss Jennings's discomfiture here became so great that Mrs. Lambert, good naturedly anxious to repair her indiscretion, rose to take leave.

"I really am quite unfortunate with poor Miss Euphemia in always forgotting that I must not talk about Mr. Fosbrooke before her," she observed, as Sir Arthur conducted her through the hall. "Well, that is beyond everything! She actually won't let Mr. Walsingham hand her to the carriage! The poor thing is a greater simpleton than I took her to be!"

"I am sorry Mrs. Lambert alluded to Mr.

Walsingham's marriage as being likely to interfere with Lady Clarence's comfort," said Sir Arthur, after the first part of the drive homewards had passed in unbroken silence. "It will be difficult, I fear, to persuade her that her residence at Marchwood will not be inconvenient. I had no idea the place was in so uncomfortable a state; and to put it in thorough repair would certainly entail a greater expense than would be at all advisable. We will speak to Mr. Walsingham about his mother's intentions, Isabel. Perhaps some arrangement might be made for not disturbing her in her present portion of the house, though she would probably object to obliging you to furnish the whole. Really the place to-day seemed to have fewer capabilities of improvement than I had supposed; and what with poor Lady Clarence's dejection, and Mrs. Lambert's unfortunate remarks, and my anxiety about Maximilian's being on the

water in such dangerous weather, the morning has been quite an unpleasant one."

"The Falcon's white sails are gleaming in Comerford harbour, dear uncle," said Isabel, with an attempt at cheerfulness, as the carriage came in sight of the ocean. "Lady Clarence shall not leave her home on my account, depend upon it;—and I trust to be able to convince her and you that there is as little cause for imagining that my union with her son will impair her comfort, as you must confess there has been for your uneasiness about my cousin's return."

The favourable influence which had lately been at work with regard to Mr. Walsingham's affairs was not confined to the successful result of his courtship. A long pending suit in Chancery was, about this time, announced to be on the point of decision; and its termination in his favour appearing certain, the only drawback to

his satisfaction consisted in the necessity of leaving the neighbourhood of Wentworth Court for an indefinite period; his presence in town being considered requisite for the completion of the business. In the hope that success would enable him to abridge the period which Sir Arthur had desired might intervene before their marriage, Walsingham departed with the less reluctance from knowing that he left his betrothed safe, for the present, from the assiduities of the man whom he persisted in regarding as his rival. A few days had formed the brief limit of Lord Lymington's stay, and Wentworth Court now assumed an air of unwonted seclusion. Neither Sir Arthur, who was again a sufferer from illness, nor his family, were at present disposed to take an interest in the ordinary concerns of the neighbourhood. The sisters, in the prospect of their inevitable separation, saw sufficient cause to render them averse to general society, and desirous only of being

together; while, as her home became dearer to Isabel, she lost, in more important considerations, the prejudices she had cherished with regard to her cousin since his return. To Maximilian himself, indeed, in a principal degree, this change was to be ascribed. Devoting himself to his uncle, to whom he became every hour more invaluable, his conduct rendered it no longer possible to withhold her esteem and regard from the affectionate and manly sustainer of Sir Arthur's declining years, the beloved master and generous patron of his numerous dependants. To him was now resigned the almost exclusive management of the Wentworth property;—accessible to all, his time and exertions were at the service of the lowest of the poor people, by whom he was absolutely worshipped. A gravity almost painful to his uncle, and fixed and stedfast in its nature, had succeeded his former variable humour. His numerous engagements, and his

unremitting attention to Sir Arthur, prevented much of his time being spent in his cousins' society; but there was no possible act of kindness or attention to them which escaped his notice, or was not instantly performed; and Isabel learned at length to regard in a far higher, though not quite so romantic a light, the kind friend who had assumed so elevated a place in the affection and esteem of those by whom she was surrounded.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Leonato hath invited you all; I tell him, we shall stay here at the least a month, and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

"You will not ask me, Melicent, how we have been going on at St. Austin's, since you left us; though I am dying to tell you how comfortable we have been, and how I have longed for you to witness the happiness of which you were the cause!"

Mrs. Tresham was again ensconced in her favourite chair at Wentworth Court, and was now availing herself of the first moment of her being left alone with Melicent after her arrival.

"You cannot think how easily Tresham has learned to be pleased and entertained. He quite likes to talk, or to read to me, and you have no idea how pleasant it all is."

"I assure you, that it was from no want of interest in the subject, that I waited for your communications; I have heard, however, of Mr. Tresham's good fortune in possessing a wife so excellent and so devoted."

"Who could possibly have spoken in that way of me, Melicent? for after all, it is Tresham who is changed, and who has actually become almost as foolish about me, as poor Stanley used to be. I really think of asking you to speak to him now, for fear he should make himself as ridiculous before your whole party, as he is sometimes when we are alone. He never will let me exert myself in the least, and is always thinking of something to make me more happy, while indeed, I do not see how that could be at all possible."

Mrs. Tresham certainly did look the picture of happiness, and her husband's whole manner towards her, appeared by its kindness fully to corroborate her words. He returned to the room at that moment with Mr. Wentworth, and the conversation soon turned upon the addition their party was to receive in Mr. Compton's family, who were expected on the following day.

"Our good brother seems to have acted less wisely than I should have expected," remarked Tresham. "If Lymington's statement is to be relied upon, I do not envy Lindesay either his future bride, or his amiable father-in-law."

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresham to Melicent; "what an overpowering young woman that Miss Compton must be! If she talks to me as Frank says she will, I cannot imagine what is to become of me!"

"Indeed I am afraid that Lord Lymington has been very severe upon our excellent young

friend," replied Melicent; "I assure you, she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and every one is envying Colonel Lindesay his success in winning such a prize."

"That is exactly what I expected from Miss Wentworth," said Tresham, laughing; "all, in fact, that could be said in favour of that feminine atrocity, a very superior young person."

"You shall not laugh at me for saying any thing in behalf of Mr. Compton. I give him up to you most willingly, having no doubt that he will repay us with interest for any trifling amusement which his character may now afford us."

"That will not satisfy me; it must be the fair Alice whom you surrender to my censure. The father I do not care about, and shall merely endeavour to annoy him in every possible way, if he makes himself troublesome; but for Lindesay I have a great regard, and consequently a corresponding aversion towards his fair and sulky enslaver!"

"And so our pretty Isabel is going to marry Mr. Walsingham!" said Mrs. Tresham, somewhat gravely; "I was much surprised when I heard it, for I never thought it would really be the case."

"I had always intended her to marry her cousin, and live at Wentworth Court," remarked her husband; "but, since that is not to be, I am glad she is not going further from us. I pity her, however, her present predicament, with a large party staying in the house. Have you any idea what we are to expect in the other couple of lovers? Not too much sentiment, I should suppose, between Lindesay and his betrothed."

"I have no doubt that Miss Compton will conduct the affair, as she does every thing else, in the most exemplary manner," said Max. "Not a soul will be able to conjecture from this admirable young woman's behaviour, that she has the slightest degree of preference for Colonel

Lindesay ; on the contrary, she will rather seem to dislike him than not."

" Poor Lindesay !—so enthusiastic as he is in his manly pursuits, in the care of his noble domain—is this the being he deems capable of rendering his home what Strathmorven ought to be ? Alice Compton to wed a Highland Chieftain, and become the lady of glens and rocks, abounding more than any in Scotland with picturesque and romantic interest ; and only feel, as she surveys them, that living in the highlands is extremely dull, and the distance from a town highly inconvenient !"

" Let us be charitable, and make all due allowance," said Maximilian ; " Miss Compton's contempt for works of imagination has hitherto preserved her from the associations which more frivolous minds are apt to combine with places of which she probably knows nothing more than their exact station in the map. Colonel Lindesay may possibly persuade her to read Waverley and Rob Roy."

"You really make me quite melancholy," said Mrs. Tresham. "Pray do not let us talk any more of poor Kenneth, and this very unpleasant Miss Compton!"

The hour was approaching on the ensuing afternoon, when the arrival of the Compton family might be expected, when Mrs. Tresham and the Miss Wentworths were interrupted in their social employments, by the appearance of Mr. Walsingham. Impatient to return to the society of his fair mistress, he had hurried down without waiting the conclusion of the business which had carried him to town, leaving Lady Clarence still an inmate of her brother Lord Amisfield's mansion. His hopes of a speedy and successful termination to his lawsuit were sanguine and well founded; and his pride was now sufficiently gratified by that pleasure at his arrival, which Isabel's unaffected nature did not

attempt to conceal. Still it was with a sudden revulsion of feeling, that he saw Lord Lymington, not long afterwards, enter the room; their meeting was constrained and unfriendly; and Walsingham's late satisfaction gave way to the undefined suspicion and jealousy with which he always regarded the young nobleman, and which could not fail deeply to grieve and mortify the artless and candid Isabel.

At the exact time specified in his last epistle, Mr. Compton's carriage stopped at the ancient gateway, and he and his family were met by Sir Arthur in the hall, and warmly welcomed to Wentworth Court, which, under its present aspect of winter comfort and blazing fires, its abundant evergreens, and ocean sparkling in the frosty atmosphere of a clear December, displayed quite as inviting an air as it could have done in its brightest days of summer loveliness. It was not in the good Baronet's nature to overlook any measure so likely to impart pleasure

to his friends, as that of bringing together at Christmas, under his hospitable roof, those who were soon to be so nearly connected with each other. Almost the last of a numerous family, to one differently constituted to himself, the season would have been full of melancholy retrospection; but though, as Sir Arthur looked upon his young and orphan relatives, sad thoughts of those who in earlier days had occupied their places would steal upon his mind; yet his affectionate heart clung the more closely to those still left to soothe his declining years, and he felt with gratitude, how far happier was his present state, than when, a year before, he had sat beside his solitary board, when the Maximilian on whom he now looked so proudly, was an object of bitter resentment, and only the images of the decaying splendours of his house had passed before his eyes.

Sir Arthur Wentworth had always been an object of peculiar respect to Mr. Compton, who,

while pride was his dominant feeling, well knew that he could himself boast no long line of noble ancestry. The degree of reverence which he entertained for Wentworth Court and its inhabitants, rendered him a far more agreeable visitor there than elsewhere ;—nothing less than the unostentatious comfort and splendour of Sir Arthur's mansion sufficing to deprive his fastidious disposition of an excuse for criticism. Upon the present occasion, it was in a singularly complacent frame of mind, that he took his place beside a board profusely covered with all good, old-fashioned Christmas dainties, and renewed his assurances to his host, of the gratification he experienced, at again spending that season within the only house where it ever was endurable.

His wife, allowed to speak without fear of rebuke, employed this interval of good temper on the part of her husband, in various enquiries concerning the Latimers, Lamberts, and their

other friends in that neighbourhood; and the only person at table, who seemed disposed to manifest any unpleasant or unsocial feeling, was the fair Alice. Silent and reserved, she seldom spoke, excepting when an opportunity occurred of giving disdainful expression to some idea diametrically opposite to those of Melicent, who, all smiles and animation, was exerting herself to enliven her uncle's guests, conscious that their entertainment must that day devolve principally upon herself, since the return of Walsingham, and the interest which his communications naturally inspired in her young sister, rendered her of little use in amusing the party. The impression of the Treshams, respecting the merits of Lindesay's future bride, was fully confirmed by this exhibition of amiability; and Tresham, who sat opposite to her at dinner, appeared to find ample food for interest, in watching the mood of one whom he declared to be as remarkable for the talent she possessed of

making herself disagreeable, as for the beauty which he had scarcely ever seen surpassed.

"Is it possible, that nothing has occurred of interest in Devonshire, since our agreeable visit in the autumn?" said Mrs. Compton. "Are there no weddings or balls to be narrated to us, who have been buried in our Dorsetshire solitude?"

"The time can hardly have passed more quietly with you than with us," replied Melicent. "I really do not remember a single circumstance worth relating, which has taken place since you left the neighbourhood."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Wentworth, but it appears to me that you have forgotten that Miss Jennings has become Mrs. Fosbrooke, and that the happy pair have just returned from their wedding excursion, to settle at Thornborough Park," interposed Mr. Tatnall, one of our dramatis personæ, who has been sadly neglected of late, but who on this day was a guest

of Sir Arthur Wentworth, who entertained a great regard for the worthy little man. "Mr. Fosbrooke requested me to call this morning about a slight cough which has lately been troubling his lady,—a mere trifle, which his anxiety had prodigiously magnified. He really was quite nervous and overcome about it."

"Ah! I recollect hearing of the marriage in prospect, before our departure from Danesfield. A very pretty young woman she seemed; and it was spoken of as a good match for her."

"Why, upon my word, Mrs. Compton," said Mr. Tatnall, delighted at being able to furnish a little news for the edification of the company, "it really is the kind of thing that Miss Jennings could scarcely have expected the good fortune of falling in with. I am wholly unequal to describe to you, ladies, the splendour and various luxuries wherewith Mr. Fosbrooke has surrounded his Lady at the Park, which, instead of being a plain, comfortable English country

house, as we, Sir Arthur, remember it in former times, actually resembles at present a palace in one of the Arabian Fairy Tales. There are mirrors and canopies, and black servants, men and women, and carved ivory nick-nacks of all sorts, and cabinets, japan and tortoise-shell, and the most unequalled carpets and couches. It truly is a fact, that we who know what the Jennings's have had to go through, cannot enough wonder how well Mrs. Mortimer, and still more Miss Euphemia, have done for themselves in the world."

"I was not aware of the return of the bride and bridegroom," said Sir Arthur. "We must call, Melicent, at Thornborough Park, and invite Mr. and Mrs. Fosbrooke to dinner."

"I hardly knew Miss Euphemia, as she used to be called, this morning, I protest," continued Mr. Tatnall. "She always was very small, you know, and really she seemed so wrapped up in Cachemire shawls and beautiful furs, (such as

certainly will make you ladies quite envious,) that I could scarcely make her out, as she lay on the sofa. Talking of coughs, Sir Arthur, I am most gratified to see your young lady looking so much the better for our mild Devonshire air,—quite another person to what she was when I first saw her;—and Mrs. Tresham, too, whom I had the honour of attending, now looks so well, that I ought to be quite melancholy at seeing all my patients so completely off the sick list."

"On the contrary, it seems that a new one has just been added to it. Mrs. Fosbrooke and her husband will want a little amusement at this time of year; pray allow them to be anxious about her cough!" said Mr. Wentworth, who had been much amused at the account of the splendour of which he had deprived his cousin.

"Well, that is friendly in you to me at least, Mr. Wentworth; and I assure you, many ladies would think it worth their while, to become

invalids for the sake of such solicitude as Mr. Fosbrooke's, and all the delicacies which his wealth can procure for his lady. As Mrs. Severn, who was calling at Thornborough Park to-day when I was there, observed, 'The whole was quite unequalled! So perfect a *mélange*, Mr. Tatnall, of English comfort, and Eastern magnificence!'"

"Your mentioning Mrs. Severn, Mr. Tatnall," said Lord Lymington, "reminds me of her youngest daughter, whom I was concerned to see, on my last visit to Devonshire, in very delicate health.

"Ah, poor Miss Maria Severn! we really are almost at fault about her. She used to be strong and healthy, but latterly, she has fallen into such a low nervous way, that Mrs. Severn is quite uneasy; and I quite agree with her in thinking that Miss Maria has something on her mind. However, these are things young ladies never will confess, and all the medicine in the

world, you know, my Lord, will not minister to a mind diseased!"

Lymington looked reproachfully at his friend Max, but the latter was, or pretended to be, talking very busily to Dora Compton, an awkward school-girl of about thirteen, but looking considerably younger from her diminutive stature—plain and uncouth in her appearance, and seemingly too shy to have as yet spoken to any one, excepting Max, next to whom she was placed.

"To my mind, Miss Isabel did'nt look particularly well pleased at his Lordship's being so much interested about Miss Maria Severn!" observed Mr. Tatnall facetiously to Mr. Walsingham, in the course of the evening. "I should'nt much wonder if we had hit the right nail on the head after all, and that Miss Maria may be pining away for Miss Isabel's handsome beau!—She'll hardly get him, I think, from our pretty young lady."

Walsingham turned abruptly away, without deigning a reply, but his anger rose more than ever against Lymington, who was considered by many a suitor for the beautiful girl, to whom his attention was generally paid. Isabel's engagement with Mr. Walsingham had as yet been kept secret from all the neighbourhood, and his absence had dissipated the suspicions which might otherwise have been entertained. In spite of the contempt which he felt for the opinion of such a person as Mr. Tatnall, the words he had uttered added yet another cause of dislike to those already cherished by Walsingham against his supposed rival; and his manner during the remainder of the evening, was evidently tinged with the ireful feeling which had been elicited by the poor little man's harmless jest.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Now, rather than espouse a thing like this,
I'd wed a bear that never learned to dance,
Though her first hug were mortal!"

HONEY MOON.

"You have certainly lost the most interesting scene in the world, Melicent, by being out of the way when Kenneth has just arrived, and we have all had the advantage of witnessing the meeting between him and his *fiancée*,"—said Mrs. Tresham, the next afternoon, having followed Melicent to her apartment. "You really must come down and welcome him with rather more cordiality than Miss Compton has

had the grace to show. All the freezing temperature of the day has not so effectually chilled me as did her look and manner, on seeing her lover again after his long absence!"

"I will accompany you down immediately, but surely you would not think it quite discreet were I to infuse warmth enough into my greeting to thaw the ice congealed by the frigidity of Colonel Lindesay's lady-love?"

"My dear Melicent, your most dignified and stately coldness would be sunshine, compared with the countenance of the fair Alice, as she desisted for one moment from copying a long extract from some work on moral philosophy or political economy, and just allowed him to touch the tips of her fingers; and then went on with her employment, as if her life and soul were depending on it, without saying one word to him. I could not help thinking of dear Isabel, and of her reception of Mr. Walsingham, so natural and unaffected."

"And what effect had this upon Colonel Lindesay?"

"Oh, he grew as cold as herself after a few moments, during which he looked surprised, and a little mortified. Then after he had turned away, and was talking to Mr. Wentworth at the further end of the room, Tresham actually ventured to quiz Miss Compton for being so very learned, and so much engrossed by her task; and, would you believe it, the creature pushed the book away, and sat listening to his nonsense, and looking quite animated, when she had not had time to bestow a word upon Kenneth!"

"I must really induce Alice, if possible, to relax a little in her studies while she remains here! At home she has accustomed herself to a course of reading too deep and engrossing to be pursued in society, where her thoughts

could scarcely be kept from wandering from the pages of volumes, whose very sight fills me with dread, but to which her strong and vigorous mind enables my dear girl to apply with actual pleasure," said Mrs. Compton, rising to follow her daughter after her abruptly quitting the room, where the ladies of the party were assembled after breakfast. Miss Compton had indeed retreated to the apartment appropriated to the use of her sister and herself for their morning employments, and where a numerous paraphernalia of books, and drawing and writing instruments, had accordingly been arranged. She seemed, however, little disposed to seek amusement from any of the stores thus plentifully provided; and after collecting round her several volumes of ominous size and print, and placing her materials for writing in order, she paused in her labours, and was sitting in perfect idleness, when a gentle tap was heard at the door. Roused by the sound, and taking up one of

the books that lay before her, she desired her sister to see who was there, and what was wanted, as she was very busy; but Dora was far too much occupied by the engaging antics of a squirrel, which had been given to her that morning by the gamekeeper, to take any notice of the injunction; and, in another moment the door opened, and Mrs. Compton came in.

The silence maintained by Alice, after her mother's intimation of a wish to speak with her, provided she were not particularly engaged, was interpreted by Mrs. Compton as betokening assent; and taking a seat, and drawing forth her netting, she observed while arranging it—

"It is so exceedingly seldom, my love, that you give me the least occasion for finding the slightest fault with your behaviour, that I am sure you will attend to what I am going to say without displeasure; and, to gratify me, endeavour to make the trifling alteration which appears desirable."

Mrs. Compton paused; but her daughter returning no answer, she went on in a hesitating manner—

"I assure you, my sweet love, nothing could induce me to trouble you upon a subject respecting which I dare say you are more competent to decide than I am, were I not afraid that your father should get into one of his passions about it; and indeed, last night, he took notice of it, and said something about your not being civil to the niece of his particular friend, Sir Arthur."

"I should think, as far as regards civility, my father might find defects enough to cure in his own manners, without troubling himself about mine," replied the fair Alice.

"Nay, my dear, I only intended to mention to you that, without meaning it, you have the appearance of not liking Miss Wentworth, and sometimes say things to her that sound almost rude. Now, as your father does happen

to be so very absurd about these friends, to oblige me, and keep him in his present tolerable humour, I know you will have the kindness to let your manner towards Miss Wentworth be as pleasing and agreeable as towards every one else."

"I cannot help my looks expressing my real sentiments. If I do appear to dislike Miss Wentworth, I only show what I feel, and what I have not hypocrisy enough to attempt to disguise."

"But surely, my dear Alice, since we are here, and must remain for some time, it will be necessary for your own comfort to keep on terms with Miss Wentworth; and indeed I cannot perceive why you should so much dislike her."

"Had you believed me when I tried to persuade you not to come here at all, this lecture, which, as it is, is perfectly useless, would not have been required. Why Miss Wentworth

should be so much admired, I am quite at a loss to discover. *I* think her animated manners very unbecoming for any young woman; and yet, because she chooses to talk lively nonsense, and appear to like any one that comes near her, she is to be held up as a pattern to me! I assure you, madam, Miss Wentworth is the last person I should wish to resemble."

"How can you so entirely mistake my meaning, my dear? How can you think that any one—your fond mother least of all—could consider Miss Wentworth superior to my sweet Alice? You know, too, that the moment you told me how much you disliked the idea of coming here, I did all in my power to persuade your father to give up the visit. But what is my influence with him? Nothing. Now if we both do but combine, we can generally manage him, because you have so much more judgment and firmness than I ever had;—so, do not be angry, sweetest;—and I will never mention Miss Wentworth's

name again, if it bring a frown to that beautiful brow."

Softened, in some degree, by her mother's flatteries, Alice replied, "I suppose, if my father really notices anything of my aversion to his all-perfect favourites, I must keep the peace by dissembling it. Even the enchanting Melicent is not so odious to me as her cousin, Mr. Wentworth, who always takes pains to set everything she does and says in the most favourable light, and reserves his sarcasms and raillery for whatever I may chance to utter."

"How can you imagine that any one can find a subject for ridicule in your conversation, my dear, which is never frivolous like that of other girls? Ask Colonel Lindesay's opinion, and he will tell you that Miss Wentworth and her cousin ought to be of very little consequence to the future mistress of Strathmorven."

"On the contrary, he is another reason for my disliking to be here. You must be blind

not to see his evident admiration of Miss Wentworth."

"The lover of Alice Compton would scarcely, I should imagine, waste a thought upon another! I certainly have been blind to everything of the sort that you mention, and am convinced such can only be the creation of your own diffidence of merits which every one else would perceive to be in no danger of an eclipse. Banish these idle fancies, dearest! they are so unlike your usual strength of mind. Let me see you happy and smiling, and there will be little fear of Miss Wentworth or any other woman surpassing my child in loveliness!"

"I don't mean to stop any longer here," suddenly broke in Dora. "I want to go and show my squirrel to papa!"

"Stay, Dora! What an object the child is!" said her mother. "Why does not Harper make you more fit to be seen? I do not believe that you have looked at your lessons this morning,

Dora, though I told Harper to see that your books came, on purpose that you might not be idle. As for that odious animal, your father will soon settle that, for he hates pets!"

"Whether the books are come or not," returned the gracious Dora, "I don't mean to do any school in the holidays; and as for the governor, you neither of you know how to manage him any better than a cat. You'll see he'll like my squirrel of all things!" And, wholly regardless of her mother and sister, away flew this youngest scion of the Compton family to seek her father, whom she found in the library with Sir Arthur, busily engaged in writing.

"Positively, these continual interruptions are not to be borne! Oh, it is only my little daughter. Well, my child, what have you got there?"

"Oh, it's the sweetest little creature in the world, papa! and mamma and Alice are as cross

as two sticks about my having it, and say you will be sure to take it away."

"I should be sorry to interfere with your innocent amusements, my dear;—but do not put the creature on my back. There, that will do—now take it away, dear, I am busy."

"But I need not do any French lessons, need I, papa? It is very hard that I should be made to do school, when I am come away for the holidays."

"True, my child. I see no reason for anything of the kind, during the space which Sir Arthur's goodness has afforded you for recreation. I will speak to Mrs. Compton on the subject."

CHAPTER XVIII.

" I ask not, in the dangerous wave,
First to upset her, then to save;—
I ask not midnight's treach'rous hour;
The perfum'd air—the moonlit bower;—
Of all the twenty-four to win her,
Grant me, kind Heaven! the hour of dinner."

LORD FRANCIS EGERTON.

THE Earl of Chellingham and several gentlemen of the neighbourhood were on this day added to the large party that were already inmates of the hospitable mansion of Sir Arthur Wentworth. Among these guests was included one who, however little his appearance or conversation might warrant such a result, seemed likely to

banish the complacency which had hitherto rendered Mr. Compton, compared with his ordinary self, almost agreeable. This personage was the Vicomte de Fontanges, a French nobleman, who, having become acquainted with Mr. Severn's family in Paris, was now staying at Oaklands, and had been invited to Wentworth Court in conjunction with his friend Augustus. The circumstance of his being a foreigner was alone sufficient to create a prejudice against him with the narrow-minded Mr. Compton; and another cause for dislike was added in his holding a high station under the present French government, which that gentleman's bigotted political principles led him highly to condemn. Monsieur de Fontanges, however, did not appear to wish to intrude the opinions of his party, whatever they might be, upon others;—his conversation was lively and interesting, and his presence was acknowledged as an acquisition by the rest of the company.

"Turning towards Colonel Lindesay, soon after they were seated at the dinner-table, Lord Chellingham observed, in his usual oratorical manner,

"I apprehend, Colonel Lindesay, that our country sports must necessarily appear attended by tameness and insipidity, when compared with the keener and more exhilarating sylvan amusements which you Highland gentlemen indulge in on so noble and extended a scale. The simple pleasures of the chace, as regards our ordinary mode of pursuing the fox and the hare, or the beating of covers for partridges and pheasants, can possess little zest, I should imagine, for one accustomed to stalking the red deer among its native fastnesses, or bringing down the black-cock and ptarmigan upon their own wild and desolate muirs."

"I have not been so much engaged in field-sports as usual this year," replied Colonel Lindesay; "and although, as your Lordship says,

there is a degree of wild grandeur accompanying such pursuits in a mountainous district, which is perhaps wanting elsewhere; yet we have no hunting in Scotland to be compared with that of your great midland counties."

"Are you an enthusiast for the English delights of hunting and shooting, Monsieur de Fontanges?" inquired Mrs. Tresham.

"I am happy to say the necessary probation in that line is fairly over, and that your foxes and partridges are in no farther danger from me," answered Monsieur de Fontanges. "A season at Melton, and an autumn on the moors, I underwent, as I am assured, in a most creditable manner; and have thereby earned, I trust, the luxury of repose during the remainder of my life."

"A Frenchman is not expected to excel in pursuits solely adapted for our English tastes and limbs," growled old Compton. "I see no

occasion for his meddling with anything of the kind."

Monsieur de Fontanges looked rather surprised, but Lymington quickly observed,

"Had you been earlier accustomed to these recreations, Monsieur de Fontanges, you would find them as indispensable as we do. Such a life as our's was last year, Tresham, at Strathmorven, would suit me better than anything in the world. The command of so extensive a domain, and the best shooting and fishing in Europe—what could a man wish for more?"

"The great magician of the North," observed the Vicomte, "has invested your beautiful country, Colonel Lindesay, with too much interest for a foreigner not to be desirous of exploring its romantic regions; and really, on the whole, it surpassed my expectations. Excepting for that very uncomfortable mist which prevails there, it would be a very delightful place of residence."

"We hold the mist which you condemn an additional charm to our mountain scenery," said Colonel Lindesay. "I trust it will not deter you from again treading Scottish ground, Monsieur de Fontanges; in future I shall be happy to offer you a sportsman's welcome in one of the most interesting parts of the Western Highlands."

"While Lindesay and Monsieur de Fontanges are discussing Scotch mists and scenery, I must ask you one simple question," said Tresham, addressing the future mistress of Strathmorven. "Miss Compton, had you ever the good fortune to taste a snipe pie?"

"No, I never had," said Alice, turning towards him with a smile. "Is it anything peculiarly delicious?"

"Then I do envy you," continued Tresham, "the exquisite pleasure you have yet in store! There is no place under Heaven to be compared with Scotland for the delicacies with which it

abounds. There are golden plovers by hundreds—woodcocks which, though less to be considered as a rarity, are still fit for the table of an Emperor !—not to mention the muir-fowl, and the inimitable way your Scotch cooks, Lindesay, have of dressing them."

" I can scarcely imagine anything much better than woodcocks and grouse," observed Alice; " and then, Mr. Tresham, there are those delightful Scotch breakfasts people talk so much about !"

Whilst the general conversation turned upon some other topic, Tresham observed in a lower tone to the now animated Alice,

" Perhaps I ought to apologise, Miss Compton, for having endeavoured to interest you on such a subject; but, am I permitted to say that to the future Highland lady, it ought to be one of import; and really when you are immured in your feudal castle, you will need these trifling comforts."

"Oh, I was very much entertained with what you were saying, Mr. Tresham; and not in the least offended, I assure you."

"It will be some consolation," pursued Tresham, "when you have been left in solitary grandeur day after day, to enjoy the fruits of the desertion of the Highland Chiefs whom Lindesay will assemble for the slaughter of his game. Perhaps, however, they will lure you to accompany them; I am sure you ride well, your figure is so admirably adapted for it; but do not hope to be allowed anything but a little rough pony, on which you will have to toil through morass and glen, dingle and brake, until not one vestige is left of the exquisite taste which would originally have regulated Miss Compton's toilette. Then, wet through with the mist, which it seems you are to regard as lending another charm to the mountains you are tired to death of ascending and descending —you return to your home to preside over a

party consisting of rough Scottish Lairds, whose accent will sound as barbarous to your gentle ears, as a delicacy and refinement to which they are wholly unaccustomed will be found utterly incomprehensible to their more savage souls!"

"What a terrible picture of my future fate, Mr. Tresham! And are the Highlands really as bad as you describe them?"

"Do not let your affianced Lord overhear the treason we are uttering," said Tresham, lowering his voice still more; while Alice seemed to find his conversation too interesting to allow of her paying the slightest attention to any one else. "You will be fêted and admired, of course," he continued; "and they will probably deafen you by tuning their bagpipes in your honour to their national strains of welcome;—a pibroch, in poetical phrase. Then you will occasionally have the advantage of traversing those bleak and desolate muirs, concerning whose delights our friends have just been raving; and crossing

bridges, the very sight of which will make one timid and feminine as Miss Compton tremble and turn pale,—in order to enjoy the satisfaction of spending a few days at one of the delightful residences of some of your new friends, —some desolate tower, built in that peculiar and detestable spot, because considered safe, in former days, from the incursions of an enemy; and you will wish a thousand times before you leave it, that it had still continued to be looked upon as equally unapproachable."

"Now, Mr. Tresham, you really are too bad!" exclaimed the laughing Alice. "I am sure you must be making the worst of it all on purpose to tease me. I will not let you talk any more about the Highlands if you do not behave better."

"Well, then, I will tell you that I have no fault to find with Strathmorven, of which I will only say that it is worthy of Miss Compton's residence; and that she will scarcely find it dull

and lonely, since there are many to whom, when she is its mistress, it will offer irresistible attractions. What can induce Miss Wentworth to take you all away so soon? Promise that you will not be angry with me for laughing at the Highlands!"

The promise was readily given; and Alice, looking as different as possible from her usual self, followed her mother and Mrs. Tresham to the drawing-room. When there, her newly-found animation did not lead her to exert herself for their amusement; and she sat silent, with a book in her hand, until later in the evening, when Tresham again approached her, and seemed to have found some other topic equally enlivening with those of Scottish dainties and Highland miseries. A fourth person was required to form a whist table for Mr. Compton, whose unfortunate wife was nightly compelled to undergo his strictures and sarcasms upon the folly of people who were utterly incompetent to

the thing, ever attempting to play at such a game as whist; and the offered services of Monsieur de Fontanges were accepted, greatly to Mr. Compton's annoyance. Lord Chellingham had declined playing, and was now devoting those attentions to his fair hostess, to which her station had at first entitled her in his opinion; although latterly the effect of her graceful and dignified manners had tended to infuse into the mind of the noble Earl certain vague ideas of how well Miss Wentworth would fill the place of the late Lady Chellingham, and preside over his magnificent castle and stately household.

Lord Lymington, looking towards Alice and Tresham, gaily observed in a whisper to his sister, "Can your experience in any way enlighten us as to the power which your Pygmalion seems to possess of inspiring life into a statue?"

"I have been wondering all the evening," was the answer, "what it could be that he

found she liked talking about. It does not seem anything very brilliant, if we may judge by that snipe pie which she seemed quite amused with at dinner!"

Mrs. Compton, meanwhile, who always thought that Alice must be right, was quite delighted with the animation which was making her look so peculiarly lovely, and much gratified by the unwonted success which had attended her maternal admonitions of the morning.

CHAPTER XIX.

"He hath studied her well, and translated her well; out of honesty into English."

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

"WHY do you not propose to your friends, Melicent, that they should drive to Danesfield this morning to see the hounds throw off? It will be a little change after you have been imprisoned so long by this dismal weather," said Sir Arthur, while the gentlemen were discussing their plans for the day's hunting, during breakfast.

"That will be delightful," said Mrs. Compton. "In my opinion, there cannot be a more

beautiful sight; and then, Mrs. Tresham, we can return Lady Latimer's visit."

"Those who wish to see more of the run than its commencement can ride some distance without inconvenience," said Mr. Wentworth. "The country round Danesfield is open, and easy riding even for ladies."

"Miss Compton, let me offer you my horse," said Isabel; "you will like him, I am certain; and my uncle will not, I know, allow me to leave the house to-day."

"There you are quite right, my dear; and Miss Compton will be doing you a favour by preventing your being tempted to increase your cold."

"I am much obliged to you for the offer," replied Alice, coldly; "but upon this occasion I should imagine it preferable to accompany my mother in the carriage; as I cannot approve of the idea of leaping hedges and ditches, and

scouring the country in the train of the Devonshire sportsmen."

"You cannot imagine, that any one is meditating exploits so daring," said Melicent, laughing; "but I do not see why we should not ride quietly to Danesfield, as well as in any other direction,—and even a little farther, if we find the route as practicable as my cousin represents it."

"Why will you not consent, Miss Compton?" said Tresham. "I assure you, there need be no apprehension of your being led into danger by us, since I, for one, never am an advocate for daring horsemanship in a female, whose command over her steed must necessarily be imperfect."

"Oh! I dare say there will no risk; and if your sister will really lend me her horse, I shall be happy to go with you, Miss Wentworth."

No farther objections being raised to the scheme, within a short time afterwards, Tresham

had succeeded in securing a station by the side of the fair Alice, over whose safety he seemed to consider himself bound to preside. "Thanks for having vanquished your fears, and allowed me the gratification of showing you how utterly groundless they were," he said, after they had, by quickening their pace, left the rest of the party at a considerable distance behind, and were now proceeding along the highway, at a more leisurely rate. "I am grateful to Miss Isabel Wentworth, for enabling me to see you mounted in a manner more worthy of you than the poney which you will remember is to be your steed in Argyleshire. There, I suppose, you will assume some species of Scotch bonnet, and tartan plaid, and discard that odious hat, which so ill replaces the exquisite little cap you wore this morning at breakfast."

"I never should have thought of your noticing my cap, Mr. Tresham!—You do not then, admire ladies in their riding dresses?—In gene-

ral, I think, gentlemen like to see them in a habit; but I agree with you entirely."

"I have no doubt that Miss Compton has been told, and with justice, how well her present attire becomes so perfect a form; but even Miss Compton is yet more charming in her feminine garb, than in any thing which seems less peculiarly adapted to the gentler sex; less soft and unconstrained, and partaking more of the stiffness of our unpicturesque costume. Talking of dress;—if you allow Lindesay to interfere with yours, he deserves infinite credit for the selection of your peculiar and classic style, which exactly pleases my fancy."

"Oh, Colonel Lindesay has, I assure you, nothing to do with my toilette! What could make you think of such a thing? I do not think he cares about dress; and certainly he does not understand anything more about it than just to say what suits his taste best."

"And that I suppose will be all that he thinks

you ought henceforth to consult! But I am a connoisseur—and hold an art which lends additional witcheries to your already enchanting sex, well deserving of attention; and involving, in fact, a deeper interest than many of those abstruser sciences whereon so many hours are wasted."

"Of course it must be of more consequence that one should attend to these things, and know what one ought to put on, than to what after all is of very little use, after you have once been taught all that one is obliged to know," observed this highly superior and intellectual young person.

"You, Miss Compton," pursued Tresham, "I rejoice to see, avoid the error into which most women degenerate, of losing the general and striking effect of attire becoming their loveliness, whilst bestowing their care upon minutiæ which, after all, are utterly thrown away. Can any one imagine that a man would be so sense-

less as to examine the texture of muslin and lace, and turn his gaze from the beauties that such auxiliaries should adorn, indeed, but from which they should never divert the attention? I would not have a woman bend implicitly to the sway of fashion;—while paying a reasonable deference to its dictates, let her consult the true models of beauty and the picturesque. What can be more flowing and graceful than the apparel immortalised by the pencils of Vandyke and Lely, and now in some degree restored to us by modern taste? Or what more enchanting than such forms as they pourtrayed—how rarely seen in life!"—and Tresham gazed, as he spoke, upon his fair companion;—"arrayed in the rich simplicity so worthy of their matchless loveliness; and when every grace and beauty is enhanced by that correctness of judgment which leaves nature to itself, without loading the fair form with ornaments;—then, by way of relief, one simple touch—a flower placed, for instance,

in the braided tresses, adding the one thing wanting, and preventing the least formality from marring the perfection of the lovely image!"

"Do you like flowers in the hair then?" said Alice. "I have always been told that they would not be becoming to me."

"Do not deem me such a barbarian, Miss Compton, as to blame the classic elegance of your Grecian coiffure; but for flowers—natural ones, of course—I own I have a weakness; and sometimes, when I have looked with admiration at the taste displayed in your simply braided tresses, I have longed, I must own, to add the only thing that, in my opinion, could have increased their beauty. Will you permit me some time to try my skill?"

"Fancy your dressing my hair, Mr. Tresham!" said Alice, laughing; "and now you will not be able to find any flowers for me to try with."

"If you will wear them, the flowers shall be

procured, doubt not, were I to seek them from the Antipodes," he whispered, as they were joined by Miss Wentworth and the rest on the verge of the park; and a few moments brought them among the huntsmen assembled within its limits. Their party was immediately surrounded by numerous acquaintances, among whom were Mr. Severn, and his friend the Vicomte de Fontanges, who had again been persuaded to enact the Nimrod. Leaving them thus engaged, the course of our narrative leads us back to Wentworth Court; where Isabel, who had remained at home, was sitting reading over the fire, when, earlier in the afternoon than she had expected any of the party to return, Lord Lymington entered the apartment.

"What can have brought you back so soon?" she said. "I thought you were a keener sportsman."

"I have lamed my horse, I am sorry to say, and returned hither to get remounted; but

really you look so comfortable, and your fire is so temptingly bright, that I shall decidedly, as your sister's pompous admirer would say, relinquish the exhilarating pleasures of the chace to keener and more enthusiastic sportsmen. Upon my word, Miss Wentworth appears to me to have every prospect of becoming Countess of Chellingham."

"You are the most determined matchmaker I ever saw! What could make you imagine that stately personage to be thinking of marrying Melicent?"

"Did he not talk to her through the half of yesterday about the excellences of the late Lady Chellingham?—a sure sign that he meditates giving her departed ladyship a successor? And did he not refuse to play at whist?—a most unequivocal compliment;—and remain by her side all the evening? Depend upon it he would never have so decidedly have committed himself, unless his mind had been fully made up."

"Poor Melicent! Imagine her destined to listen to such tiresome speeches all her life! The utmost grandeur of Chellingham Castle could not repay her for a week of such martyrdom."

"Certainly, the noble Earl is not exactly the man whom I should consider worthy of Miss Wentworth. In my opinion, a wife cannot be truly happy, unless she looks up to her husband, and at least considers him superior to herself. With all her diffidence of her own merits, it will be difficult for your sister to choose a husband with whom she could find that the case."

"I quite agree with you, and I should see Melicent marry a man whom she could not entirely rely upon and esteem, as well as love, with painful doubts as to her future happiness. Had you not set me the example, I should have been afraid of being laughed at for saying, that I believed few such men were to be found."

"I know but one, who would attain to our

standard, and how differently have his views been fixed!—how unworthy is Alice Compton to be Lindesay's wife! I really believe that I must possess the propensity for match making, of which you accuse me, so strong is my regret, that there is no possibility of forming one between Miss Wentworth and my brother, who seem to me exactly formed for each other."

"Has your Lordship had the misfortune to lame all your hunters?" asked Mr. Walsingham, who had entered the room unnoticed a moment before, and now stood with no very pleasant feelings, contemplating his betrothed, thus comfortably established with the man whom of all others he most feared and disliked. "I was, it seems, mistaken in imagining that I had heard you profess an intention of returning to the field!"

"Such was my intention," returned Lymington; "but having been imprudent enough to set foot within these enchanted precincts, I have

long given up all rash designs of the kind, and am not to be lured away from this station."

"Your taste, my Lord, is to be commended!" said Walsingham, bitterly; "far be it from me to attempt to shake your resolution, or to offer farther interruption to the interesting conversation on which my presence is probably a restraint." With an angry glance at Lymington, but without looking towards the amazed and terrified Isabel, Walsingham hastily withdrew. The appearance of Sir Arthur at that moment, and the enquiries he made respecting Lymington's return, enabled Isabel, as soon as she had recovered from her surprise, to follow her lover, anxious to remove the suspicions which had rendered him so violent and unjust. She found Walsingham in the library, which he was pacing with hurried and impatient steps.

"This is an unexpected favour, Miss Wentworth," he said, pausing as Isabel entered. "I am sorry that my return should occasion you so much annoyance!"

"I have followed you to ask what can have made you so angry—why so simple a circumstance should have grieved you, Walsingham?"

"No doubt it is one of frequent occurrence," he replied, in the same harsh manner. "Nevertheless, I, Madam, am not disposed to consider your evident preference for Lord Lymington's society, so trivial a circumstance as you seem to desire. This is not the first occurrence which ought to have opened my eyes to your real feelings; but I have been wilfully blinded."

"For heaven's sake do not talk so wildly!—You are angry,—you will repent this violence.—How have I merited these reproaches?"

"Explanations are unnecessary, Miss Wentworth. I am at length undeceived. Madman that I have been to believe a woman could be constant; or resist flatteries and attentions persisted in, long after reason and delicacy should have precluded their being either offered or accepted! My sense of what is due to the man

to whom your hand is pledged, is more acute than yours appears to be," he continued, without allowing Isabel time to speak, his vehemence encreasing every instant. "The world already names you Lymington's——recall, if you will, the promise which binds you to me!—the bond was cancelled the moment the inclination refused to ratify it."

"I know not how to answer violence so unexpected—taunts so uncalled for. Lord Lymington, as you well know, Mr. Walsingham, is indifferent to me; and when your passion has subsided, you will feel how much you have wronged one, whom you at least ought to have known better."

Scarcely heeding her low and faltering accents, her angry lover proceeded:—

"You say well, Miss Wentworth—I ought indeed to know the inmost feelings of the being from whom I once swore no power should sever me. But that time is over; you have, as I

might have foreseen, repented of the sacrifices which an union with me entails upon you. So let it be, then. Deem me not ungenerous enough to take advantage of an imprudence into which compassion, perhaps, not love has led you. I claim from my future wife devotion the most unbounded—every thought, every feeling must be mine;—and when such an union of hearts becomes a constraint, then, believe me, the fulfilment of our engagement would be as irksome to me, as to her whose deep and first affections I once imagined to be my own."

Wholly unequal to reply to such insulting violence, Isabel sank upon a seat, and Walsingham, without noticing her agitation, left her to recover as she might, from the effects of treatment such as till now she would scarcely have deemed credible. She remained in the same position, with her head resting upon her folded hands, long after his departure, and until the

entrance of Mr. Wentworth in some degree aroused her.

"Isabel! are you ill?—What has happened?" he exclaimed, as she raised her head on his approach. "Tell me, what has made you look so pale and terrified?—You have been weeping!" and taking her hand, he endeavoured to learn from the trembling girl, the cause of her distress. Her first hurried enquiry after Walsingham, enabled her cousin in some measure to divine its origin, and he gradually drew from her an imperfect account of the scene that had occurred, and in which she vainly endeavoured to place the conduct of Walsingham in the most favourable light.

"And is it possible, that you have been exposed to such treatment?" he exclaimed, after she had besought him to undertake what she dared not again attempt, and to assure Walsingham of the groundlessness of his suspicions.

"And can you bear with such mildness conduct which, even softened as it is by your recital, I can scarcely believe that one so gentle as my sweet cousin should have been forced to endure? It is for Walsingham to sue for pardon—to humble himself in the dust to obtain it, Isabel—and for you, calm yourself, and wait till your jealous and tyrant lover shows himself worthy of the forgiveness which your indulgence would already accord."

"I was so much frightened—so astonished, that I did not say what I might have done, and that made him angry. I did not tell him that he was mistaken, or indeed, anything that was intelligible; and now if you will not speak for me, I know not what I must do."

"Doubt not that I will do any thing to assist you, or remove your uneasiness. Since it is your wish, I will certainly make this explanation to Mr. Walsingham; although I should wish him first to see, and acknowledge

the ungenerous part he has acted towards you."

"Oh, never mind me—pray seek him, Maximilian—prevent his quarrelling with Lord Lymington. You know not how much he was excited—only do this, and I never, never will forget your kindness."

"Would that I could do more to serve you; but since this is all, you need be under no apprehension. I will seek Mr. Walsingham instantly."

The mission thus reluctantly undertaken by Mr. Wentworth, who with difficulty subdued the anger occasioned by Walsingham's conduct, was attended with success; for by this time, the latter could not but be aware of the excess into which he had been hurried. Unable to bear farther agitation, Isabel, after she had accorded her forgiveness, without a single word of reproach to her now repentant lover, retired to her chamber, excusing herself from appearing

again under the unfeigned plea of illness. The remainder of the day, which had been so painful to Isabel, passed more quietly than usual with all the inmates of Wentworth Court, their numbers being diminished by the absence of most of the gentlemen, who were engaged to dine at Danesfield.

CHAPTER XIX.

" Ainsi, prête à subir un joug qui vous opprime,
Vous n'allez à l'autel que comme une victime.
Et moi, tyran d'un cœur qui se refuse au mien,
Même en vous possedant, je ne vous devrai rien."

MITHRIDATE.

ANXIOUS to dispel all doubts of her affection from the mind of Walsingham, Isabel readily yielded, on the following morning, to his whispered expression of a wish to converse with her alone; and sought accordingly the apartment already mentioned as belonging peculiarly to herself and Melicent, and which their duties to their guests now generally occasioned to be left unoccupied. She was soon joined there by

Walsingham; and while she wondered what could still make him look so grave and uneasy, he addressed her in a tone which, though divested of harshness, was not altogether free from reproachful expression.

"Independently of other causes, Isabel, I have sought this interview to renew my assurances of regret for the violence into which I was yesterday hurried, and which caused you, I fear, so much alarm. For worlds I would not willingly grieve you; and from you I may surely expect the most lenient judgment of a warmth which, however blameable, is to be attributed to the fervency of the passion wherewith you have inspired me."

"Believe me, Walsingham, I have forgiven the offence you allude to, fully and without reservation. Do not let it again be mentioned between us. I care not for the sufferings that are past, while I may trust that no doubts will henceforwad disturb your confidence in me."

"That must depend upon yourself, Isabel. You have, indeed, removed that uncertainty respecting your feelings which has lately embittered every hour; but if you would prove that your affection is what I could wish it, you will not refuse to relinquish what, at any time, is liable to renew between us scenes as mutually harassing as that of yesterday."

"I do not understand you," said Isabel, gravely. "If, as you say, your confidence is restored, I do not see how you can contemplate the possibility of again distressing me so greatly by suspicions which you confess to be groundless."

"I fear that you can, indeed, little imagine the feelings attendant upon devotion like mine. But at least you will believe me when I tell you that the continued presence of Lord Lymington is hateful to me; and that, if you will not decidedly put an end to attentions which I trust it is not your wish to encourage, I cannot answer for

preserving the calm equanimity of temper, which to me appears incompatible with ardent affection."

"Forgive me if I say that distrust seems to me still less in unison with the esteem which I regard as the inseparable accompaniment of such an attachment. You are mistaken in supposing that Lord Lymington has ever presumed to address a word to me infringing in the slightest degree upon the respect called for by his knowledge of our engagement. There is no cause for jealousy, believe me, in attentions which have never been more than those of a friend."

"On this subject, Isabel, I fear we shall scarcely agree. I cannot doubt the existence of a passion which every word and look betrays to my watchful gaze. I ask from your love, which then I will never again call in question, the promise that you will at once destroy the presumptuous hopes he entertains of supplanting me in your favour;—I ask what you have entitled me

to require, that you will gratify me by banishing my rival from your presence."

Walsingham approached her as he spoke, with a countenance expressive of his confidence that she would grant his unreasonable demand, as readily as she had accorded her forgiveness on the preceding day; but, roused by this fresh proof of ungovernable jealousy and mistrust, Isabel drew back, and with equal firmness and gentleness, replied;—

"No, Mr. Walsingham, this cannot be! I have already assured you of my attachment—to doubt my sincerity is an insult unworthy of yourself and me. I have told you that Lord Lymington has never afforded me the least ground of offence;—and it is therefore impossible that I should, in this instance, comply with your wishes."

"As you will, Miss Wentworth!" returned Walsingham, haughtily. "You cannot, then, condemn a jealousy to appease which you refuse

to make the slightest sacrifice. It must, for the future, be my task to school myself to repress those feelings which in their fervency are, it appears, alike incomprehensible and offensive to you;—and to learn, as best I may, to content myself with the calm and rational affection which is all, I find, that you allow me to claim."

Walsingham left the room as he concluded these bitter words, deeply irritated by the unwonted decision wherewith Isabel had acted; leaving the latter to contemplate, for the first time, with dismay the destiny which linked her to one whom she now almost despaired of satisfactorily convincing of the purity and sincerity of her feelings.

A very different scene was passing meanwhile in the saloon, where, soon after Isabel's retreat, the Earl of Chellingham had been announced as a visitor. After inquiring with all

due formality concerning the health of Sir Arthur, and all the absent members of the family, he assumed a seat near Miss Wentworth, and commenced a discourse which his auditors required some time clearly to comprehend.

" It has ever been my opinion, Miss Wentworth,—and on this point, at least, let me trust to find your judgment coincide with my own,—that it is a duty in some degree incumbent on those individuals who may be raised by the favour of the blind Goddess above the ranks of the commonalty, to encourage and promote, as far as may be in their power, the interests of the numerous and respectable mercantile establishments of this commercial country. Nor can this desirable end, I am inclined to imagine, be more fully attained than by the maintenance of a style of living and expenditure proportioned to the station and degree of every individual, and tending to distribute among the less opulent and more necessitous classes a portion of the

dormant and superfluous wealth of the aristocracy of the nation. May I hope that thus far our sentiments agree?"

"Certainly, nothing can be plainer," replied Melicent, totally at a loss as to the drift of his Lordship's address, unless it might be that he wished to impart his intention of erecting a hospital. With a profound acknowledgment of the favour of her assent, Lord Chellingham proceeded:—

"There are few modes better adapted to further the aim which we both consider so beneficial, than the exertion of similar profuse and unbounded hospitality with that exercised by my esteemed and respected friend Sir Arthur Wentworth. But I, alas! am a solitary being, and have no fair dame to preside over festivities which, lacking the governing and directing hand of one of your gentler sex, are devoid of their chief and brightest ornament. Still, influenced partly by the above considerations, partly by

others more personal and less disinterested, I have ventured hither this morning to entreat that you will honour by your countenance, and that of your friends, a slight and unostentatious entertainment at my poor dwelling, the deficiencies whereof must be excused by the kindness of those who can hardly be so deeply sensible of them as its unprejudiced and far from partial owner."

Collecting from this harangue that Lord Chellingham's intention was to invite them to his castle, Melicent replied,

"Your Lordship's consideration for the good of the country seems certainly likely to meet with our approbation, since it promises us so much pleasure. I must not, however, venture on a decided answer, as my uncle's health causes him in general to decline all invitations at this season of the year."

"I am aware that I must not so far infringe upon the rules of etiquette as to make my

request in so irregular and informal a manner. I would only hope that this plan may be honoured with your concurrence, ere I proceed to arrange its details in a more deliberate and tangible shape."

Melicent and Mrs. Tresham united in assuring the Earl of their entire approbation of his project; and trusting that he had, by this early intimation, made Miss Wentworth fully sensible that she was to be regarded as the principal personage to be complimented by his intended *fête*, Lord Chellingham took his leave.

"Has any one seen Dora?" inquired Mr. Wentworth, a few minutes afterwards. "I cannot think what has become of the child since breakfast."

"Positively, Max, your partiality for that engaging little creature is perfectly incomprehensible!" said Lymington; "and the gratification her conversation appears to afford you is enough to make us all envious of the power

which you alone seem to possess of eliciting her fascinations."

"I am sure it is very good-natured in you to take so much notice of the disagreeable little thing; I am frightened to death whenever she and her squirrel come near me," observed Mrs. Tresham. "I must confess that I wonder as much as Frank does at your patience in talking to her."

"My friend Dora, I assure you, possesses a great store of information upon subjects which at present considerably interest me; and my time is by no means thrown away, in extracting it from the little imp."

"On what possible subject can Dora Compton afford you information?" exclaimed Lymington. "This is most mysterious, and we really must insist upon having imparted to us some of your new and valuable knowledge."

"That shall be done most willingly, since, for once, we are free from the presence of any of

the Compton race, and Colonel Lindesay is also away; though, indeed, I would with pleasure allow him a share in my communications. But, oh! you ought to have the interesting Dora's own simple and unaffected narratives,—her own delightful expressions, far too vivid and forcible for me to venture on to ears polite;—you should listen to her graphic descriptions of the domestic circle at Compton Lodge, where, upon my word, old Compton appears to be incomparably the least odious of the group.

"This is another engaging feature in the character of your favourite, Max. There does seem to exist some affection between Alice and her mother; but your little demon, it appears, abuses her whole family."

"I begin to be rather sceptical concerning that same affection. It is a wonderful incentive even to maternal indulgence, to know that the slightest offence will send the amiable *enragée* into a fit of determined sulkiness, from which no

effort, no kindness can arouse her, until its natural limit, varying from a week to a month, or even longer, be passed."

"You do not mean that Miss Compton is as bad as that, Max?—I thought her cold, stupid, insufferable; but really you are making her superhumanly atrocious."

"Fact, I assure you. The amiable Alice keeps her mother in awe, by the fear of one of these recurring moods of silence and sulkiness, into which the slightest provocation will send her; her father, as I am told by my informant, who in her own way is quite as detestable as the rest of her kindred, terrifies all but herself by his violence, and manifests an especial dislike towards Alice, who, with his wife, is always trying to manage and deceive him; while Dora exults in having so improved upon their schemes, by telling her agreeable papa of the machinations of his eldest hope and her mother, who certainly do their best to drive the child crazy,

by tormenting and scolding her from morning till night, that she gains her own end in every particular, there being nothing which her impudence and cajoleries cannot obtain."

"Surely you are too severe!" exclaimed Melicent. "Mrs. Tresham, we will not believe that any woman can be so odious. Dora has been venting her own spite against her sister, who, perhaps, is obliged to be strict with the unmanageable little creature. I do not think her report is to be credited."

"You must enact all the incredulity yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Tresham, quietly. "Nothing they can say about Miss Compton will surprise me; and for my part, I think she always looks sulky, excepting when Tresham is talking nonsense to her."

The sudden appearance of the amiable Dora at this moment, offered an opportune interruption to their comments.

"I wish you would come with me, Max, and

look at something I've got to show you! You don't know how it will make you laugh."

"You must first tell me what it is, Dora; or else I will not come away from the fire."

"Why then, when I have told you, you will be scolding me for saying it before *her*," answered Dora, nodding her head as she spoke at Mrs. Tresham. "However, you shall have it, and you may all come if you like! There's Alice sitting in the conservatory with Mr. Tresham, and looking as pleased as Punch; while he is talking such nonsense to her, you've no idea! It was so funny, that I thought I'd fetch some of you, and show you where you could listen, and then you would be able to come out with it, the next time she was in one of her grand humours."

"Have you any curiosity that way, Laura?" asked Lymington.

"Oh, not the least. I am very glad he has found something to amuse him to-day, when

the weather keeps him within doors. He used to be quite lost on such a day as this in the country, but now he has so many resources!"

"Well, if you won't come, I don't mean to lose such glorious sport," exclaimed Dora. "If Alice doesn't look sharp, she'll get a precious wigging from Colonel Lindesay, if he comes back and catches them!" and with these words, away hastened Mrs. Compton's little fairy, to improve her mind, by listening to the edifying conversation of the well-brought-up Miss Compton, and her presumptuous admirer.

END OF VOL. II.

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